DOCTOR WHO
NOVELLAS

COMPANION PIECE

ROBERT PERRY & MIKE TUCKER

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FOREWORD: BRIGHTON BEACH THEOLOGY

Brighton Beach, recreating a classic scene. I can almost hear the whirr of K9 in the distance, stumbling over the stones wretched dog! and Romana, coming to the rescue. I sink down into the deck-chair, enveloped not by a long scarf, but by the heat and swirling sea rust. Clutching the text of Companion Piece, I drift away, into the future and the Doctors seventh incarnation.

Companion Piece intrigues me. Both Doctor Who and religion have always intrigued me. One of the two has never failed to entrance, inspire and enthral me, and give me joy.

Some of my favourite Doctor Who stories are still the early historical ones, such as The Aztecs or The Massacre of St Bartholomews Eve, where religion and politics were driving forces. In some other stories religious groups became too much of a cliché: robed and cowled men (never unrobed women) chanting, sacrificing virgins, their psychic energy awaking ancient, long-dormant alien beings.

In Companion Piece religion comes in with a bang! No one expects the Holy Inquisition! And, of course, to make the Church the villain is a good hook. After all, bad perverted religion still sells newspapers, whereas good religion rarely makes the press. To describe this book as a religious story would be an instant turn-off, but Robert Perry and Mike Tucker have succeeded in creating a Roman Catholic culture in the 28th century which resonates with popular knowledge of that tradition today and builds on our reaction to it. This novella breaks new ground for Doctor Who because it raises so many explicitly theological questions.

Many of these questions are voiced by new companion Cat and are ones that most of us ask at some point. In my experience, most people, although perhaps uninterested in organised religion, are fascinated by the ultimate spiritual questions, looking for the meaning or purpose of life itself. So Cat asks how we can have faith when we see so much evil. What happens after death? Is there such a thing as a soul? This may lead us on to other, equally basic questions, such as what it means to be human. Is God interested in other, non-human beings? What value has the life of a dolphin or an alien being… or a Cyberman?

Books of Christian doctrine (and of other faiths) attempt to provide answers to some of Cats questions, although Ive yet to see a Vatican pronouncement on the status of alien life-forms… Personally, not always sitting comfortably with narrow or rigid answers or definitions, whether of the Protestant or Catholic tradition, I find the title of Christian agnostic a respectable one. Faith does imply living with difficult questions, be they theological, ethical or whatever, and often living without all the answers.

Christianity (and the ancient Jewish creation stories) seeks to explain the uniqueness of humanity and what it means to be truly human made in the image of God, with the capacity to relate and to love, to be creative, to share in responsibility and in care for planet Earth. The concept of soul (meaning we are more than just the physical and emotional) almost symbolises the link between creature and Creator and eternal element, and the essence of the person. Anglican priest and poet David Scott says (in his Moments of Prayer SPCK, 1997) that the soul is that part of us which responds to God. He is reminded of black box flight recorders on planes, which preserve crucial details and hold the secrets, the story; the soul records the way we are in the eyes of God.

There is also in many faiths a strong tradition of the sacredness of all creation and of the love of God for all his creation. Is it, therefore, not impossible that alien beings have souls, the ability to relate to God? Would they, in their own particular world or situation, need their own Christ figure, to fulfil their spiritual need?

Perhaps the frightening prospect of the Cyberman, an even more chilling possibility today than nearly forty years ago, may help us to define what we mean by being human. Originally human themselves, do they retain their own soul or do they mark the end-point, once free will and emotions have been engineered out of the person?

Religion has an inherent power and can easily become oppressive and manipulative. In this novella, on the planet Haven, it produces a reaction of fear, and fear itself is one of its motivating forces. Freedom poses a threat to it, so religion is prepared to fight and kill for orthodoxy. Del Toros Church, with its wealth and militia, demonstrates the corruptive tendency of power and is a perversion of the true aims of religion.

Similar corruption has been explored in the Gallifreyan corridors of power and perhaps the Seventh Doctor, more frequently than his preceding incarnations, is aware of his personal capacity for the use or abuse of power. Manipulation for good or bad?

The Seventh Doctor lives in a grey area, rather than one of black and white morality.

Previously, in many adventures, the Doctor had an almost Christ-like role he comes into a world and shows it a better way forward with good overcoming evil, solutions given to problems, the healing of a situation, and the gift of hope. But the Seventh Doctor often sets in motion events that can either save or destroy. We see the responsibility that must accompany knowledge and power, and the possible subsequent agonies of conscience. We did good, didnt we, Professor?

The Doctor, so often respectful of alien creeds and cultures, sees straight through the trappings of Del Toros Church, identifies the evil threat that has to be countered, then plunges into the conflict. Its left to Patriarch Julian, physically the frailest, most vulnerable character, to represent the more traditional face of good religion and to express the value of love and hope, wisdom and compassion, and to echo the Gospel worlds, You must become like a little child. Within the conflict, those values may seem as frail and vulnerable as Julian himself, but we know that they are also very dear to the Doctors own hearts.

Images run through my mind… Gothic buttressed spaceships. Torture chambers. Killer priests. Heretic Time Lords. The Doctor alongside a new companion… What would the Archbishop have made of all this?

Revd Colin Midlane, Parish Priest & Hospital Chaplain, Brighton, August 03

PROLOGUE

The cargo transporter Saint Augustine dropped out of hyperspace in a blaze of ionised particles and swung silently into its allotted orbit. Warp engines vented plasma and powered down, and slim aerodynamic wings slid gracefully from their housings.

Junior navigator Ellen Trellawn punched co-ordinates into the flight computer and slumped back into her seat, waiting for the confirmation signal from traffic control to proceed. She stared through the forward view-port at the planet that hung below her. Haven a patchwork of blue and gold, green and bronze hung against the inky blackness of space; unspoiled, innocent. And the last place in the galaxy that she wanted to be arriving at. Cheer up; we wont be down there that long.

Her co-pilot the only other occupant of the cramped, functional flight deck was grinning across at her from his adjacent seat. Charles Dolbyn was an old hand at this cargo run, a veteran with nearly seven hundred hours in warp. Something he never let her forget. He unsnapped his flight harness, rose to his feet and peered down over her shoulder.

Sure it doesnt appeal to you?. There are people who would give up anything to settle on a planet like this. Unspoilt atmosphere, lazy pace of life, no technology.

I happen to like technology. Im a girl who likes her creature comforts.

Fresh air, open spaces.

No shops, no restaurants.

Lots of well-built farmers…

Ellen clouted him with her cap. Give it up, Charles. Im not about to go back to nature.

A harsh buzzer sounded. Ellen nodded at the control console. Thats our clearance.

Youd better take us down.

Yes, maam. Charles slid back into his chair, grinning from ear to ear, and refastened his harness.

The cargo ship started to bank, the planet sliding from Ellens view. Filters slid automatically into place over the view-port as the sun swung across in front of her.

There was a lurch as the ship touched the atmosphere.

Here we go, said Charles.

Ellen swallowed hard to clear her ears, and sighed. Eight days on Haven whilst their ship was loaded with grain. Eight days with nothing to do but stay inside the compound and get drunk. Contact with the indigenous population was kept to a minimum not that she had any great desire to meet them. The planet was crude. Simple.

Uncomplicated. God, if it hadnt been for the famine out on the backworlds, then first contact would never have been made.

The ship straightened and the planet loomed large in the view-port once more. A planet of fields and crops, a planet of food. It was that abundance of natural resources that had persuaded the old Council of Settlers to land on Haven in the first place to break one of their most sacred laws: Dont contact a people until theyre evolved enough to be contacted. Hunger had seen their noble rules consigned to the trash where the Council had feared to tread, the Church had gone boldly forward, marching as to war, and all that.

A series of electronic beeps rang around the flight deck as Charles lined the Saint Augustine up on her glide path. The beeps merged into a steady tone as the ship homed in on the cathedral beacon.

Saint Saviours, Braak. It must be. One of the great wonders of the new worlds.

Gothic, ancient looking, and built less than twenty years ago. Already a popular site for pilgrims from all over the rimworlds. Pilgrimages had died out on the old planets centuries ago, but not out here, where the Church had made initial contact with dozens of systems. As was the case with most of the backworlds, the Church practically owned Haven now. Space port taxes for using cathedral landing pads, export duty; the entire operation was controlled and run by the Church, and they had to be coining it in.

Ellens stomach lurched as the air brakes roared into life and the

freighter dropped towards the planets surface. As on every other landing that she had ever made, Ellen clutched at the small Saint Christopher medal that hung around her neck, and mentally kicked herself for her superstition.

The roar of the descending transport boomed across the cliff tops. Anne-Marie struggled with the reins of her plough as her two kreekgs started at the sound. She looked up at the vapour trail cutting across the sky, and cursed under her breath.

She pulled the animals to a halt and hopped down from the plough. The kreekgs shook their heads and grunted as she smoothed their muzzles and cooed softly to them. The roar of the shuttle settled into a low rumble, like distant thunder. Anne-Marie could see it arcing down over the horizon. It was probably heading for one of the prairie cities Treel or Braak, one of the cathedral cities.

She stared at the fading trail against the blue of the sky, wondering what these strangers from other worlds were like. Apart from the priests and monks and other Church functionaries who mingled freely with the populace, in twenty years no one had ever actually seen an offworlder. They took the grain that was grown, the crops that were harvested, they paid good money to the farmers that worked the fields, but they remained mysterious, almost mythic figures.

The old men in the taverns were always quick to offer their stories about what the strangers were like; that they were tall, blue-skinned giants with flaming hair; that they were so ugly that only the holiest of Church men could bear to set eyes on them.

Anne-Marie had heard dozens of different tales since she was a child, and had believed none of them.

One of the kreekgs lowed softly, pawing at the ground with a hoof. Anne-Marie scratched its ears. Dont worry. Its just the machines of the offworlders.

The animal shook its head free of her grasp, its eyes wide with fear. It butted at its companions side, straining against the straps of the plough. Anne-Marie frowned.

The animals had heard the transport noise before, and it always startled them, but they soon quietened down. Now they seemed to be getting more and more agitated.

She caught hold of the reins, trying to calm the skittish beasts. With a

bellow of fear, the animals reared up, jerking Anne-Marie off her feet and sending her sprawling in the furrowed earth. She scrabbled desperately to catch hold of the reins as kreekgs and plough set off at an oblique angle across the field, the steel blades cutting a ragged swathe through the neat lines of freshly planted crops.

Anne-Marie struggled to her feet. I can see me digging out grandmothers old recipe for kreekg stew before the day is out, she muttered. Wiping her hands on her mud-splattered smock, she set off after the careering animals, boots squelching in the soft soil. She picked her way carefully through the neat rows of seeds, watching every footfall. The kreekgs were prairie animals, better built for haulage than for speed, so she would soon catch up with them. Besides, when they reached the fence, there was nowhere else for them to go.

A strangled whinny of pain made her look up in alarm. Both animals had stopped and were stamping at the ground, thrashing their heads from side to side.

What in the name of God…

Then it hit her. A wave of sickness and nausea that made her gasp out loud. Seconds later, she fell to her knees, grasping at her forehead, pain like white hot needles lancing through her skull. The agonised bellowing of the kreekgs was joined by something else now: a deep, resonant trumpeting, rising and falling. Wind whipped at her hair. Through streaming eyes she saw the air before her start to blur and shimmer, solidifying like curdling milk.

The pain began to build, and Anne-Marie screamed out in agony as, with a shattering roar, a large, silver cube appeared amongst the neat furrows of the field.

Her skull throbbing as if it would burst, Anne-Marie crossed herself clumsily and tried to haul herself to her feet, stumbling away from the strange cube. Bile rose in her throat, and for a moment she thought that she would pass out.

Without warning, one side of the cube started to move, sliding outwards on gleaming metal runners. Blue lightning arced from the open box, tearing at the sky. Puddles of rainwater started to hiss and boil, the field was lit up with brilliant flickering light, and out of the light came the figures; one, two, then a tide of bodies. Far more than the cube could possibly have held. One of them stumbled and fell,

tumbling into the churning mud at Anne-Maries feet. Her breath caught in her mouth. The mans face was contorted in pain, lips drawn back over his teeth in an agonised grimace. He reached out for her with a trembling hand. Run, he hissed. Get away from here, before…

His words became a howling scream as the cube suddenly flickered and changed, its surface distorting and bulging, folding itself in impossible directions. Lighting danced in crackling spirals around them. Anne-Marie began to cross herself, and to pray.

Holy Mary, Mother of God…

Then there was a sudden and impossibly bright pulse of light and, in her last few moments of terror, Anne-Marie saw her hands wither to stalks in front of her face, before blackness took her over.

The energy pulse hit the Saint Augustine without warning. Ellen struggled to keep the ship on an even keel as every light on the instrument panel went red.

Static flared in her earpiece. Tearing her headset off, she hauled back on the control column. Alongside her, Charles frantically tried to reboot the ships systems. Cathedral beacon is down. All the automatics are offline.

Ellen gave a cry of frustration. Come on you piece of junk. Come on!

Shes lifting! Charles was incredulous. Shes lifting!

The smile had barely reached Ellens lips when the wave of pain washed over her.

Ellen convulsed in her chair. She could hear Charles screaming as the ship began to roll. The last thing she was aware of was the spire of the cathedral looming in the view-port and her Saint Christopher biting into the palm of her hand.

CHAPTER ONE

The Doctor ducked as an energy beam sliced through the wall next to his head, showering him in drops of molten metal. He brushed frantically at his smouldering jacket and bellowed into the gloom of the battleship, desperately trying to locate his companion.

Cat? Cat, where are you?

His voice attracted unwanted attention, and bolt after bolt of energy slammed into the wall above him. Clamping his hat onto his head, the Doctor scampered from his hiding place, ducking behind one of the bulky crane controls that littered the platform.

From the shadows of the service corridor he could hear the clicking, rattling voices of the Wierdarbi, see the glint of metal and the low flickering light that burned deep within their artificial compound eyes. On the other side of the cargo bay was the TARDIS, its familiar blue, box-like shape nestling amongst the harsh alien technology of the Wierdarbi battle platform. The Doctor sighed. There was no cover between him and it.

One of the Wierdarbi scuttled out from the corridor, antennae quivering, a fearsome looking pulse-laser clasped in the claws of its forearms. Head darting back and forth, it gestured to its comrades with a secondary arm, and slowly more and more of the aliens began to edge their way out onto the platform. The Doctors mind was racing. He was running out of places to hide!

Searing pulses of light suddenly raked across the metal floor, and the Wierdarbi scattered, mouthparts chattering angrily, blazing eyes searching for their attacker.

Well, dont just sit there, you dozy pillock, run for it!

The Doctor stared up to see his young companion perched precariously on one of the gantries that criss-crossed overhead. She waved frantically at him, then hoisted the cumbersome Wierdarbi laser off her hip and unleashed another burst of energy at the retreating aliens.

The Doctor launched himself towards the TARDIS, brogues skidding on the oil-smeared deck-plates. Behind him he could hear the screeching, metallic staccato of the Wierdarbi commandants voice and

the roar of laser fire. Overhead he could see Cat haring across the gantry, racing for the ladder that scaled a steel pillar next to the TARDIS. The Doctor fumbled in his pocket for the key. There would be no second chance at this.

He was ten metres from the TARDIS when the harsh crack of a Wierdarbi whip echoed around him and his legs were snatched from under him. He hit the deck hard, his umbrella skittering across the floor. A metallic foot slammed down next to his head.

Groaning and breathless, the Doctor rolled onto his back. The Wierdarbi commandant loomed over him, mandibles clacking. Almost, Doctor, almost.

A gleaming tentacle snaked from the augmented, insectoid torso, winding its way inside the Doctors jacket. With a sharp click, it gripped something and withdrew.

The Wierdarbi cocked its head and examined the small phial of liquid metal.

Wierdarbi gold is precious, little one. You were foolish to think that you would get away with it.

The Doctor smiled weakly. Well, you know what its like when youre redecorating.

You want to find that colour thats just right

Razor sharp claws extended from the commandants forearms. Lets see if the colour of Time Lord blood matches our furnishings.

A piercing whistle echoed around the cargo bay. The Doctor craned his neck back to see Cat leaning precariously over the gantry, something black and bulky hanging from her outstretched arm.

Special delivery from Cat and the Doctor She let the object go.

The Doctor scrambled to one side as his pre-war Gladstone bag dropped twenty feet and smashed onto the deck-plates, bursting like a water-filled balloon. Dozens of small metal shapes scattered across the floor.

What is this? hissed the commandant.

Oh, dear, said the Doctor.

There was an explosion of movement as every one of the metallic objects sprouted a variety of legs, tentacles and protuberances and launched into a sudden attack on the startled Wierdarbi. The cyborgs barely had time to raise their weapons before the first of them collapsed onto the deck in an untidy heap of disassembled parts.

Not possible! The commandant swiped at the tiny robots that crawled over his exoskeleton. You will die for this, Time Lord!

He raised a bladed forearm, then watched in disbelief as it dropped neatly away from his torso and crashed to the floor with a metallic clang.

Sorry. The Doctor shrugged apologetically. My assistant does seem to like to take things apart to see how they work. Dancing between the Wierdarbis flailing arms, the Doctor plucked the phial of liquid from between the pincers.

No! The commandant lashed out at him, but the Doctor was already scampering towards the police box shape of his TARDIS.

The Wierdarbi gave a bellow of rage and started after him. Warning lights were beginning to light up across his torso readouts. He crashed to the ground as three of his legs folded under him. The little robots were swarming over him now, precision lasers flaring and slicing. He could see the Doctors companion sliding down the ladder, grinning broadly. Then Time Lord and girl vanished inside the tall blue box and, with an elephantine trumpeting, the box vanished from view.

The Doctor mopped at his forehead with a large paisley handkerchief and regarded the small glass phial in the palm of his hand. Refilling these fluid links really is going to be the death of me one day.

You should stock up, get a bumper pack. You know, buy one, get one free, something like that. Cat shrugged out of her donkey jacket and slumped back onto the chaise longue.

Quite. The Doctor shot a disapproving look at his companion. Would you like to explain to me what just happened out there, Miss Broome?

Cat gave him a cheeky grin, and popped the lid off the biscuit tin that sat on the low occasional table.

I saved your ass. Again.

Thats not quite what I meant. The Doctor slid the delicate glass phial

into an ornate, brass-studded socket on the polished wooden surface of the console and leaned back against one of the perforated metal girders that arced over the control area. I meant, how does a twenty-eight year old woman manage to overpower a hive of Wierdarbi?

By using my considerable talents, and by listening to you for once. Cat popped a whole biscuit into her mouth. The Doctor raised an eyebrow. Listening to me? That would make a change… Thats not fair, said Cat through a mouthful of crumbs. I always listen! I dont always do what you say, but I always listen. And what did I say this time?

Lets see… That the Wierdarbi were a warlike and vicious breed of giant insects, adapted with artificial parts by an unknown alien intelligence; that they were probably not going to be very happy about us stealing some of their precious horde of mercury; and that we should be very careful.

Exactly! So which bit of that did you fail you understand?

Hey! I took precautions!

Yes… The Doctor frowned. Small, cybernetic precautions. I suppose it would be too much to ask where you got them from?

Cat looked sheepish. Your workshop…

Ah, you stole…

Borrowed!

They were prototypes!

So I field tested them for you! Cat grinned. I thought they worked pretty well.

The Doctor gave a deep sigh. Youre incorrigible.

And beautiful and intelligent and witty… Cat stretched out on the chaise longue, rummaging in her jacket pocket. And in recognition of the help Ive given you in repairing the fluid link, you can let me have a cigarette.

I thought you agreed not to smoke in the TARDIS…

And I thought you said that I could if Id been good!

Well, Catherine, you havent been good, the Doctor snapped. You seem

to have forgotten something.

What? Cat was crestfallen.

My Gladstone bag! wailed the Doctor. Have you any idea how hard they are to come by?

It was old and tatty…

It had character!

It had moths!

Id had it for centuries. It was given to me by… well, Gladstone actually.

Then you were long overdue for a new one! Cat slid off the chaise longue and hopped up onto the control dais next to the Doctor. Is this thing working properly now?

Of course it is, said the Doctor defensively.

Good, said Cat. Its time we went shopping!

The market square of Braak was a riot of colour and noise. Street traders meandered through the crowds, waving their goods under the noses of anyone and everyone; children raced through the tangle of stalls, pushing close to the hastily erected pens and corrals to pat the muzzles of the pa-arteks and young kreekgs destined for the auctions.

Philippo tutted angrily at the chattering crowd of youngsters that clustered in front of his stall. He didnt like children at the market. They cluttered the streets, they brought no money and they stopped people getting easy access to his goods.

He waved angrily at them, cursing in his native tongue. The children scattered, shouting playground insults. Philippo sighed. He didnt like being out in the middle of the market. It was too close to the pa-artek pens, the smell of the animals masking the delicate aroma of his freshly roasted plegan beans. He preferred his old spot, over by the city wall, next to the cathedral, but until the repairs were finished, he had to make do

He craned his neck back, staring up at the spire of the cathedral. Through the tangle of scaffolding and bracing, the scar through the stone was still visible. The noise from the chisels of the stonemasons

rang out across the square. It had been sixteen months since the shuttlecraft of the offworlders had all but demolished the west wing of the cathedral. Sixteen months since the Devil-box …

Philippo felt goose bumps run down his spine. Like all the people of Braak, he still had nightmares about the day that the Devil-box had arrived, could still feel the pain tearing through his mind, could still hear the screams… He felt a wave of anger. This had been a good place before the offworlders had come with their machines and their technology; now it was a world haunted by memories of howling winds and flaring lightning, a place where the victims of that terrible day still shambled through the streets, their minds wiped clean, their bodies changed.

Philippo crossed himself. Thank God for the monks and the priests. If they had not taken the poor unfortunates in, and exposed the evil hand that had been set against the people of Braak… He shook his head. It was not good to ponder on the past.

A chattering gaggle of prairie women had descended on the marketplace, gesturing and haggling over the goods on offer. Philippo smiled. It was well known that the women of the prairie had a fondness for plegan beans. He looked over his shoulder to check his stock, then realised with a curse that his kreekg was still tethered on the far side of the market, the bulk of his goods still slung in panniers across its back.

He swore loudly. In the confusion of his change of location, he had forgotten to offload the remainder of the beans; in his usual spot, he had been able to tether his beast alongside the stall, with no need to unpack every one of the bulky sacks.

He stretched his neck to see where the prairie folk were. A dozen or so of them were clustered around the stall of Enrique the clothier. The stocky mountain man was gesturing animatedly at his rolls of cloth, his rich voice booming across the market square. Philippo nodded in satisfaction. Enrique was a hard negotiator. The women would be there for some time.

Snatching up his jerkin, he darted out into the bustle of traders. If he could just get two more sacks back to his stall before the women arrived …

The marketplace was bustling, and it took Philippo some time to make his way through the crowds to the quieter outer edges. Kreekgs and

redaara of all sizes stood patiently in lines at the feeding troughs, snorting and pawing at the ground.

Philippo stumbled through the hoof-churned mud to his heavily laden old bull-kreekg.

The sooner he could get back to his old patch, the better.

He fumbled with the leather straps that held the panniers in place. Two bags should be enough for the moment. He could come back for the rest once the prairie women had gone. Better still, if he could persuade them to take the rest of his stock, wholesale as it were.

He heaved one of the panniers onto his shoulder, grunting as the strap bit into his flesh. His beast jerked against its tether, braying hoarsely. Whats the matter with you? Philippo slapped its rump harshly. Youve plenty of food. They look after you better than they do us…

The kreekg shook its maned head, rattling the steel rings that were set into the city wall. Philippo frowned. A wind had sprung up, and there was a noise; a noise that reminded him of …

All colour drained from Philippos face. The pannier dropped from his shoulder, splashing into the mud and sending beans scattering between the feet of the kreekgs.

The trader turned slowly, eyes wide with fear. Across the street, in the shadow of one of the municipal buildings, a shape was beginning to form: a tall blue box, a light blinking on its top. A grating roar echoed around the stone walls.

Philippo pressed himself between the skittering animals, clutching at the small cross that hung around his neck and praying desperately that the pain that had haunted his dreams for over a year would not return.

With a loud, asthmatic thump, the noise stopped. Then the light on the box stopped flashing. Philippo watched in horror as a door swung open and two figures stepped out into the crisp morning air. As he watched, the smaller one a girl brought flame flaring to life in her hand and raised it up to her mouth.

With wispy smoke drifting around them, the two strangers vanished into the marketplace, bickering animatedly. Philippo tried to calm his hammering heart.

Witchcraft… he whispered.

Deep, sonorous bells began to ring out across the square. Philippo looked up. Above him, the cathedral stretched into the morning sky. Yes… The priests… The priests must be told.

All thoughts of plegan beans gone from his mind, Philippo stumbled towards the cathedral.

Cat blew a hazy blue cloud of tobacco smoke into the air and stared in delight at the effervescent market around her.

The Doctor nodded pointedly at her cigarette. I thought you were going to give up, this year…

Yeah, and I thought you were going to let me take a look at your teeth at some point. Im sure youve got some root canal work that needs doing…

The Doctor grimaced. Perish the thought.

Cat caught hold of his arm and squeezed it. Right, so loosen up a bit and stop giving my vices a hard time. Look on the bright side Im not bringing blokes back to the TARDIS.

True.

Not yet, at least.

Laughing at the Doctors indignant expression, Cat dragged him towards the colourful market stalls. Come on, lets see if we can buy you a bag thats a bit more funky than your last one…

The Doctor shook his head in despair. Funky?

Philippo stood breathless in the quiet gloom of the cathedral, hands clutching nervously at his cap. At the end of the long central nave, two robed figures conversed in hushed tones. One of the cowled shapes turned and stared in his direction, and Philippo shivered.

The shadows of the cathedral were long and dark, flickering fingers cast by the thousands of candles that lined the walls. Huge, soaring buttresses climbed the ancient stone to the gilded ceiling, and overhead hung the huge, ornate cross.

As a child, hed watched the cathedral being built: spires, buttresses, rising from the earth like one of the mud nests of the biter-ants in the

prairie. It had frightened him, and continued to do so over years of dutiful observance of holy worship under its spidery stonework.

It had been an old priest that had helped him conquer his fear. A gentle old man from the mountains of a place called Italy, on a world far from here.

Philippo gazed sadly at the cross. That had been a long time ago. Father Bernoldi was dead, and with the arrival of the next bishop, Agatho, all his old fears had returned.

His heart jumped as one of the cowled figures glided down the nave towards him, sandals slapping softly on the cold, flagstone floor. The priest gestured towards a line of dark wooden booths in the shadow of the cloisters. Philippo frowned. A confessional? But I have nothing to confess. I need to see the

The priest unlatched the ornate screen door. Nothing to confess? We all have something to confess, my son. Please…

Obediently, Philippo entered the creaking wooden structure, the dark wood flexing beneath him as he sat. The door swung closed, and darkness and silence enveloped him as the priests footfalls faded away into the distance.

You have something you wish to tell me?

The question came like an explosion after the silence, and Philippo had to stop himself from crying out.

You seem frightened. The voice was low and sonorous. Tell me what has troubled you so…

Forgive me, Father. Philippos voice was trembling. I do not wish to trouble you, but I have seen… a sign… a manifestation; another of the Devil-boxes. He was gabbling now, relieved to be able to unburden himself of what he had seen. It arrived by the city walls, and the creatures within now walk among us! Something must be done. They cannot be allowed to unleash their demons upon us again! Merciful Father…

Quietly, quietly… The voice was calming. Describe what it is that you have seen.

Carefully. Leave out no detail.

Philippo took a deep breath. It was as described in the texts. A rushing wind, and a noise, like the mating calls of the wild ettriggel. Then it appeared, like a desert mirage. A tall box, blue of colour, fire blazing above it. It opened, and two creatures appeared a man and a girl. The girl made

smoke with her mouth, like the pa-artek herders do with their clay pipes.

And where are they now, these creatures from the box?

They entered the market

square, Father.

The market, indeed… Would you recognise these… creatures?

For certain. Their clothes, their manner… all is strange.

Then return to the

market, watch them, report to the cathedral all that they do. Say nothing to anyone outside these walls. But Father, the people must be warned! Philippo rose from his seat. These creatures… Will be dealt with!

snapped the voice. Now do as I have asked. Philippo bowed his head. Of course, Father. Im sorry. Its just, the memories of the last time…

I understand. The deep voice softened again. But trust me. You are in no danger.

Watch the strangers. Follow their movements. We shall attend to everything else.

Philippo pushed open the door of the confessional and scurried off into the candlelit gloom. He stepped out into the morning light with a gasp of relief. He was terrified of the task that he had been given, but more terrified still of the cloaked and silent priests that had watched him as he left. He clutched at the cross under his jerkin. The Church would deal with the strangers.

He just had to have faith.

In his office, Bishop Agatho leaned back into his seat, stroking a hand through his beard. He played the recording again, then hit the combutton.

Youve listened to it? Yes… The reply crackled and spluttered through the hidden speaker. Of course, the trader might be mistaken. Every few months some peasant sees Our Blessed Lady in his barn. No. His description is too accurate, and his fear sounded genuine. You think that they have been sent? Agathos voice cracked slightly.

His nerves were showing. He reached for the crystal glass of deep red communion wine that stood on his desk, and took a sip. Im not sure. I would have expected more than two if they knew

anything. It might just be coincidence. Are you willing to take that chance? No, I think that would be foolish, Agatho, said the voice. Someone will be sent to investigate.

CHAPTER TWO

Cat watched the faces of the children as they stared in wonder at where the Doctor stood in the middle of the market square. The little Time Lord was juggling with nearly a dozen pieces of brightly coloured local fruit, and the kids were loving it. Cat grinned. He could be such a show-off when he wanted to be.

After wandering back and forth through the market for a while, the Doctor had led her to a large tent lined with rough benches, and with a huge open grill blazing in the centre. There the two of them had breakfasted on hot spicy bread, a rich yellow yoghurt and a strong cinnamon-flavoured brew that the locals seemed to drink by the gallon.

Suitably fortified, they had decided to split up. The Doctor had wandered aimlessly off through the bustle, peering at stalls and chatting with the traders, while Cat had started in earnest on her quest for a replacement Gladstone bag. The variety of goods on display had astounded her. Food and spices, animals and clothing. Tools and trinkets and more varieties of fruit and grain that she would have thought possible.

Eventually she had found her way to a quarter of the market that seemed to specialise in fabrics and clothing and leather goods. The Doctor had given her a small purse filled with what he promised was a good selection of local coinage, and Cat had been sorely tempted to blow it all on one of the gorgeously coloured saris that the local women wore. She had made the mistake of trying on one of the elegant robes, admiring herself in front of a large sheet of polished metal. It was only when she had turned around that she had realised that she wasnt the only one doing the admiring. A crowd of appreciative men had gathered, and it had taken a great deal of gentle persuasion, and a lot of less-thangentle slapping by the owner of the dress stall, for her to get back into her jeans and sweater without a dozen sets of eager hands assisting.

Ignoring the pleas of her would-be suitors, Cat had headed off through the stalls, determined that she was going to find something for the Doctor before the day was out. Eventually a large, heavily laden trestle had caught her eye and she had pushed her way through the chattering crowds for a closer look. The stall had been piled high with different bags. Heavy waterproof panniers big enough to carry a

person hung alongside delicately beaded jewel pouches; dark-brown leather piled up next to gaudily painted canvas.

Trying to ignore the constant jabbering sales pitch of the stall owner, Cat had started to trawl through the pile of different styles and sizes. Eventually, with a cry of delight, she had pulled a heavily embroidered canvas shape from the tangle and smiled in satisfaction.

The bag had been perfect. A carpet bag in deep beige, its surface swirled with deep, rich embroidery. Blues and reds intertwined with gold and silver; stars and planets, animals and plants delicately hinted at in the twisting patterns. Paying for her purchase with a handful of heavy, perforated coins, Cat had tucked the bag under her arm and set off through the marketplace to catch up with the Doctor.

He hadnt been hard to find. She had just had to follow the excited chatter of childrens voices, and the Doctors faint Scottish burr ringing out across the cries of the traders.

She watched as the Doctor pretended to fumble one of his catches, hopping around the square like a fool, face contorting into a variety of extraordinary expressions.

Children screamed with laughter as he caught all the airborne fruit in his hat and performed an elaborate bow. Cat joined in the applause, but the Doctor wasnt finished yet.

For my next trick, I shall require the assistance of a member of the audience! he announced, holding up a piece of elastic. For a very dangerous stunt.

Cat groaned. It was one of the Doctors favourite gags. Getting someone to put the elastic between their teeth, stretching it as far as it would go, and then asking them if they were ready to begin. The person would reply, the elastic would be released and the Doctor would be catapulted backwards, prat-falling into whatever foliage or soft landing place he could find. She wondered if the woman watching from a stall piled high with silks realised that she would probably have the diminutive Time Lord floundering amongst her goods in a matter of moments.

The Doctor started to dart through the bystanders, trying to cajole one of them into helping him. The crowd was good natured, but none of them seemed to want to be part of the Doctors impromptu performance, perhaps knowing all too well what tricksters of this nature were like. Resigning herself to acting as the Doctors stooge

again, Cat started to push her way towards him.

A sudden, frightened cry made her stop. Across the square, the Doctor had found his victim, but far from just politely declining, the man was backing away, clearly terrified, trembling hands clutching at a cross, as if warding off some terrible evil.

Keep away from me, witch! the man screamed.

The Doctor stared in puzzlement. Witch?

I saw you! Saw the manner of your arrival. The Devil-box! A worried murmur went through the crowd. No, no, no. The Doctor shook his head. Let me explain… The TARDIS… You see! the man hissed. He does not even try to deny it! He speaks the name.

The crowd was getting agitated now; Cat could see anger in their eyes. Anger and fear. The majority started to push towards the Doctor, while worried mothers hurried their children in the opposite direction.

I saw them, by the city wall. This man and a girl. Arriving in a box, with wind and fire, like the texts say! He tries to lull us into false security, he plays the fool to get us close…

No, you must listen to me, the Doctor pleaded with the now-looming crowd.

You remember what happened the last time a box arrived? The man was working the crowd now. They muttered angrily.

Something has obviously happened here, blustered the Doctor.

You remember the pain? roared the man

I can possibly help.

You remember the months of suffering?

If you will trust me.

Hes a witch!

The crowd surged forward, swamping the Doctor. Cat was pushed along in the rush, carried forward by the tide of angry people. Her mind was racing. There was nothing she could do. There were far too many of them, and sooner or later they would realise …

The girl! Has anyone seen the girl?

A voice rang out across the męlée. Swearing under her breath, Cat dropped to her knees and rolled sideways under one of the stalls. She heard a cry of alarm, but the crowd was too intent on its purpose and swept by in a noisy rush.

Keeping low, Cat darted under the wooden trestles, putting as much distance as she could between herself and the mob. There was no chance of getting back to the TARDIS.

Not yet. She had to disguise herself, and quickly. Stalls temporarily abandoned in the heat of the moment gave her access to everything she needed, and soon she was wandering back towards the angry rabble, swathed in the muted fabrics of the prairie people.

The crowd had made its way towards the edge of the market, near to the place where the TARDIS had landed. She could see curious people eyeing the police box shape warily, crossing themselves as they did so. Cat hurried past them, shawl pulled tight over her head, desperately trying to get a glimpse of the Doctor. She could hear raised voices in the distance.

Being careful not to draw attention to herself, she tucked into the shadows of the city wall, skirting round the edge of the noisy mass of people that had gathered there. A small set of steps set into the crumbling stone provided a natural platform.

Eager children clustered at the top. Cat pushed up alongside them, making sure the long fabric of her dress was pulled tight around her jeans. Her breath caught in her throat and she felt her eyes blur with tears as she looked down into the courtyard below her.

The Doctor was hunched on the cobbles, his hands tied behind his back. His jacket was torn and mud-splattered, and his face bloodied. As she watched, one of the men kicked at him savagely, sending him sprawling in the mud. Cat dug her nails into the palms of her hands. She wanted to scream out, to kick and punch and bite at these people that were hurting her friend, but for the moment there was nothing that she could do.

The man that had started all this was standing behind the Doctor, arguing heatedly with a group of traders. Cat struggled to hear what they were saying, but the angry babble from the masses below

drowned out their words. Abruptly, one of the men stepped forward, grasping the Doctor by the hair and wrenching his head back.

A hush fell across the crowd. The man who was holding the Doctor was obviously important in some way. He gestured angrily towards the TARDIS.

It seems that Philippo was right; a witch does walk amongst us, and a clever one at that, beguiling us with his tricks, engaging us with his stories.

He bent down, sneering at the Doctor. But you will find us no easy pickings, witch.

He spat in the Doctors face, and released his head.

And so what are we to do? the man continued. What are we to do with the witch that has come amongst us? Philippo here thinks that we should wait, that our beloved Church will deal with him for us. But I, like many of you, lost loved ones to the madness.

He paused, staring into the faces before him.

Do you, like me, still lie awake at night haunted by howling, shrieking winds? Do you live in fear of the sudden pains, like skreetah claws digging into your skull? Do you still see jagged bolts of lightning every time you close your eyes? I do!

There was a roar of agreement from the people.

We all know the price that must be paid for trafficking with the Devil. Weve all seen the way witches are dealt with. Why wait for the Church? We know what we must do!

A single voice rose from the crowd. Burn him!

The man nodded in agreement. Yes… It is our duty.

Burn him. The two words rose like a chant now, voice after voice joining the refrain. Burn him, burn him.

No! Cat felt the word escape her throat, drowned out by the noise from below. She watched as the Doctor was manhandled onto the back of a low wooden cart. The square was suddenly alive with activity, traders and townsfolk gathering twigs and branches.

Cat was sick with fear. Her friend was going to be burned to death in

front of her and she was powerless to stop it.

There was the sharp crack of a whip, and the cart carrying the Doctor started to move, pulled along by huge, bull-like creatures. Cat pushed her way back down the steps, looking around desperately for something that she could use as a weapon, something that might stop this madness. Around her, people were chattering excitedly, as if what was about to take place was part of the days festivities, an entertainment.

Across the square, in the shelter of the city wall, a blacksmiths forge stood empty, its owner part of the jostling crowd. Cat eyed the selection of ironmongery hanging from the smithy ceiling. Scythes, ploughshares, hoes. Items more suited to keeping a well-groomed farm than fighting off a murderous city mob. With a bravado born of desperation, she slipped inside the forge, checking over her shoulder that she wasnt being watched.

Bladed tools of every description lined the craftsmans workshop. Cat hefted one in her hands, already knowing in her heart that any gesture she made was liable to be a futile one. Undoing her robes, she slid two wicked-looking scythe blades into her belt and took a deep breath.

Remind me never to take you shopping again, Doctor…

The Doctor gave a grunt of pain as his hands were wrenched painfully behind his back.

Every part of him ached and protested at the mens rough handling. Through puffy and streaming eyes, he could see a huge pyre being constructed on the scrubland just outside the city walls.

Having a barbecue? he croaked. Lovely weather for it.

Quiet, witch! A hand cuffed him sharply over the back of the head.

The only sounds we want to hear from you are the screams as the flames reach you.

Thats a shame. Ive got such a lovely singing voice.

Oh, youll sing, witc.: A grimy face filled the Doctors vision. And a terrible song it will be. The song that my wife sang when your box took her mind from her.

Listen to me… The Doctor kept his voice low and soothing, steel eyes

fixed with those of his captor. Your people have suffered some terrible catastrophe, something that you cannot comprehend. You look for someone to blame, someone to punish, but Im not the one…

A frown flickered over the mans mud-flecked face. The Doctor leaned forward, straining against his bonds. Im a traveller, an explorer, a Doctor. I came here with my friend. I can help you…

Help?

Yes. Help you to understand what happened here, help you to learn… The Doctor could hear startled cries from around him now, shouts of panic and alarm. He didnt have much time. His head was pounding with the effort. He needed just a few more seconds.

Leave him, witch! Blows rained down on the Doctor as men swarmed over the cart, pulling their comrade away from him. The Doctor saw him shaking his head, clearing his mind. Anger flared in the mans face.

Thought you could put a spell on me, did you? He lashed out at the Doctor, sending him crashing to the floor of the cart. Well, youve cast your last hex.

He looked around at the expectant crowd. Take him!

A dozen pairs of hands dragged the Doctor from the cart, sending him sprawling in the mud. He tried to stagger to his feet, but his legs gave way under him. A blow from a staff cracked across his back, making him cry out. There was ugly laughter from the crowd. A rough noose was slipped around his shoulders and, with a jerk, he was hauled forward across the wet ground.

The Doctors world became a blur of whirling faces and taunting cries. He tried to shut down his mind, centre himself for the ordeal to come, but with every jerk of the rope pain flared through him. The noise was deafening now: screaming women, jeering children, the harsh guttural chant of the menfolk. He felt himself being hauled upwards, his arms wrenched backwards, sharp ropes biting into his wrists.

The mass of bodies pressing around him eventually melted away, and a hush fell over the throng. The Doctor forced his eyes open. He was lashed firmly to a thick wooden stake, while bundles of dried wood were being stacked beneath his feet. The crowd was staring at him nervously, as if they expected this, his final moment, to be when he revealed some dark, hidden power, some spell that would set him free.

Rough torches were being lit, wicks made of animal fat crackling and popping in the morning air.

A weak smile flickered across the Doctors face. After all the complex technological prisons he had escaped from, after all the alien aggressors he had outsmarted, it was all to end here. A backward agricultural world. An angry mob. Burnt as a witch.

He gave a coughing laugh.

A ripple of concern ran through the sea of faces that watched him. A flurry of hands made crosses in the air. The leader of the mob stepped forward, blazing torch held high.

You would mock us?

The Doctor shook his head. I wouldnt dream of it.

Then make your peace with whatever demons you serve. Your time has come.

Are you sure about that? The Doctor narrowed his eyes.

The man gave a wicked smile, revealed broken yellow teeth. What do you think can save you now, witch?

That, said the Doctor, nodding at the sky.

Cat had stood on the fringes of the crowd, watching as the Doctor was dragged from the cart and manhandled over towards the stake. Everything had started to become dreamlike for her, unreal somehow. The noise of the mob had faded to a low, distant roar, while the pale morning sun bleached everything to muted whites and yellows. It had been as if time was slowing down as the Doctors death approached.

She had felt the cold metal blades in her belt, and there had been a sudden moment of total calm as she had steeled herself for her last, doomed attempt to rescue the little Time Lord.

Slowly she had started across the scrub, pushing people to one side, ignoring their cries of protest. Gradually her pace had increased as she had reached for her weapons. Hands had started to grasp at her. Head down, Cat had barrelled forwards.

And then the cross had appeared in the sky.

It burst through the hazy morning cloud with a deafening, screaming

roar, a vast, impossible mass of gleaming gold and silver, sunlight making its surface blaze like fire.

There was a moment of stunned, unbelieving silence. Cat watched open-mouthed as the huge cross wheeled in the sky, engines thundering. It was a ship. A vast spacecraft, but unlike any she had ever seen before. It was the size of a tower block, a vast column of metal and plastic, the stubby arms blazing with thrusters. No attempt had been made to give it an aerodynamic shape; pure, thunderous energy kept this thing aloft. Its surface was a twisting gothic mass of decorative swirls, buttresses and gargoyles, picked out in gleaming gold and silver. Searchlights blazed from its belly, sweeping across the terrified crowd. Above the roar of the afterburners, Cat thought she could hear music deep, sonorous organ notes and soaring angelic voices.

With a scream of engines that rattled Cats teeth, the ship began to drop, huge clawed feet unfurling from heavily sculpted hatchways.

The stunned crowd suddenly erupted into life, exploding in all directions as the downdraft from the ship tore at their clothing. Mothers clawed desperately for their children, men tried to calm terrified animals. Cat could see the stake holding the Doctor start to quiver as the turbulence from the engines engulfed it. She struggled towards him, but the surge of bodies carried her backwards. She was screaming at the Doctor, but the typhoon created by the spacecraft whipped the words from her mouth.

Remorselessly the crowd carried her back towards the city.

Cat caught hold of one of the frantic shapes scrabbling past her.

What is it, what is going on?

The young girl in her grasp shook her head in fear. Mother of God, we are all damned now.

Why? Cat demanded. Who is in that ship?

Three words made her blood run cold.

The Holy Inquisition.

CHAPTER THREE

Guii Del Toro grimaced with distaste at the cold, barren world that stretched out ahead of him. Pulling his sumptuous robes tighter, he paced slowly down the gilded ramp of the sector flagship of the Holy Inquisition. Steam rose in billowing clouds around him.

The clink of armour rang out through the crisp, sharp air as a squad of guards, splendid and sinister in coal-black breastplates quartered by a bold white cross, spread out amongst the townspeople. The unkempt mass of traders and townsfolk allowed themselves to be shepherded into a large and ragged group. Del Toro picked his way through the mud, staring into the eyes of the crowd before him, nodding with satisfaction at the fear visible there.

With a clatter of bolts and the creak of ancient timbers, a door in the cathedral wall burst open and an agitated cluster of priests, led by the puffing Bishop Agatho, splashed across the scrub. Del Toro gazed with amusement at the Bishops face, which was wrinkled in distaste as he slipped and stumbled through the mud.

Milord Grand Inquisitor… The Bishop was breathless, his face as purple as his robes as he exchanged the kiss of peace with his visitor. The speed of your arrival took us unawares.

Indeed. The Grand Inquisitors voice was low and insistent, like the droning of a huge, rasping insect. We were rooting out heretics on Torkus 3. It seems, however, that my timing was fortuitous. In a matter of moments, your flock would have taken matters into their own hands and I would have had no answers. He glanced across to where his guards were untying the Doctor from his execution pyre. It is difficult to extract information from a charred corpse.

This… gathering is not of our design, stammered the Bishop. We gave no permission. We told the witness to watch, to wait

So, it seems that the people have taken it upon themselves to do the holy duty of the Church. How devout. The Inquisitors gaze swept across the crowd. And by what means did you reach the decision that a witch was amongst us? A ring incrusted finger stabbed out, pointing at a child in the crowd. You. Who revealed this witch to you?

A frightened mother clutched at her child. Please sir, he knows nothing, hes just a baby.

Let the child answer! Del Toros voice was vicious. He crouched down, forcing a smile to his lips. Come child. You have nothing to fear. Tell me.

Philippo, the bean seller, sir, the childs voice quivered. He told us.

Ah… Philippo, the bean seller… Del Toro straightened. And where is this bean seller now?

The crowd started to mutter, glancing nervously at each other.

I am not a patient man! snapped del Toro. Where is he?

The crowd parted and a terrified Philippo edged reluctantly forward. Del Toro regarded him with slitted eyes. Our would-be witch-finder. Was your fear so great that you could not wait for our arrival?

Forgive me, excellency, I tried to hold back my fear, to watch as I was told, but the witch sought me out. Picked me from the crowd. I feared for my life!

Sought you out, by God! You flatter yourself. Del Toro snapped his fingers. Bring the witch.

The Doctor was dragged forward and thrown at the Inquisitors feet.

How do you do? The Doctor croaked. Forgive me if I dont shake your hand, Im a little… tied up at the moment. Im the Doctor, and I really must thank you for a most opportune arrival. Now, if you could untie me, I have an idea about what is going on…

Silence, witch! The guard captain gave the Doctor a sharp kick with the top of his boot.

Can we stop this witch nonsense, Im really not… The Doctor never finished his sentence. At a nod from del Toro, the guard captain snatched a small metal cylinder from his belt and pressed it against the Doctors neck. There was a sudden hiss, and the Doctor pitched forward onto his face.

Del Toro regarded the Doctors prone form with amusement. This? The object of your fear? The most unlikely of witches, it seems. His clothing may be strange, but the manner of his arrival… Philippo pointed towards the square. The Devil-box… Del Toros head snapped up, his smile evaporating. You saw this? With your own eyes?

Philippo nodded frantically. I swear! This man and a girl appeared from within.

Show me.

The Grand Inquisitor swept forward, the crowd parting like curtains before him.

Philippo scampered ahead, desperate to be vindicated. This way, my Lord, in the shadow of the apothecarys

With Bishop Agatho and his priests following uneasily behind him, del Toro approached the tall blue shape that sat amongst the clutter of the market. Ignoring the frightened gasps from the watching crowd, he placed a gloved hand on the side of the box.

Yes… he murmured. It is as I thought…

He swung round to Philippo, his eyes blazing. Two people came from this infernal device, you say?

Yes, excellency. The man and a girl

Where, then, is the girl?

I … I dont know, Philippo stammered. We have not found her. Perhaps her powers…

Her powers? snapped del Toro. Rather, fear my powers! Your lack of faith makes you blunder. He nodded at his guards. Take him.

Philippo was caught roughly by the arms. Please, he screamed, I have done nothing wrong.

That is for me to determine, snapped del Toro. He turned to the Bishop. You will have this device taken into the cathedral. Get the rabble to move it with their carts and beasts. Keep it under constant guard.

The Bishop eyed the box warily. If you are sure, eminence. But would it not be safer on board your ship? Safer? Given the nature of this… engine.

The terror it brought before… I mean, the people.

It will serve as a warning to the people always to be vigilant for the Evil One, and a reminder of the mercy and benevolence the Church

has shown to this blighted world.

An unpleasant smile danced at the edges of del Toros mouth. Besides, if our ship were to be damaged by that thing, we would be stranded on Haven until a suitable vessel could be despatched from Rome. That might mean months.

The Bishop swallowed hard. Better that it rests within the hallowed walls of the cathedral, yes? I want you to oversee it personally, Agatho. Bishop Agatho dabbed a piece of linen to his brow and nodded. At once, milord. Good. I will take the witch to my ship and question him.

The Grand Inquisitor turned and swept back towards the ship, the guards dragging the unfortunate Philippo after him. In the shadow of the huge cross, the Doctors unconscious body was being strapped to a metal stretcher by more guards. Del Toro beckoned to a grizzled captain, who strode to his side.

Milord?

Captain, we have the man but a girl is still at large in the city. Once the landing site has been made secure and the Time Lord capsule transferred to the cathedral, take some of the men as many as you need

and search this city. Yes, milord. Tear the place apart if you have to. I want that girl!

Hidden among the frightened throng, Cat watched as the ornately robed Grand Inquisitor vanished into the bowels of the huge, gleaming ship. Her heart sank as she saw the Doctors stretcher hoisted off the ground, and he too was taken inside. All around her there was an audible sigh of relief as the great metal doors slid shut behind him. People started to mutter and chatter, nervous and jittery. Cat pulled her shawl around her face and started to push her way out of the square.

She had seen the murmured conversation between the Inquisitor and the guard captain, seen his eyes raking over the crowd. He would be looking for her, of that she had no doubt, and any thoughts she might have had about making a heroic rescue had vanished as soon as the guards had taken charge of the Doctor. These men were no prairie traders they were well trained and disciplined, and they had complex technological weaponry. They gave off a convincing illusion of pomp and ceremony with their black helmets and gleaming swords, but Cat

had seen the ugly stub-nosed shapes of blasters beneath their cloaks as they had cleared a path for their master. If they had blasters then it was a fair bet that they would have trackers, and then her disguise would be useless.

No. Her only chance now was to lie low and try to get to the TARDIS when things were quieter. But she had a horrible feeling that the hawk-faced Inquisitor would probably have thought of that.

As she approached the overhanging section of city wall where they had landed, her fears were confirmed. Spurred on by the urgings of the priests and the presence of the Inquisition guards a less-than-willing party of market traders was manhandling the bulky police box shape of the TARDIS onto the back of the same cart that had earlier held the Doctor. As Cat watched, it was lowered onto its side, the pair of huge bull-like creatures whose job it was to pull this load bellowing in discomfort as their harnesses stretched under the weight.

There was a harsh whip-crack and the two animals started to strain at their yokes.

The cart gave a groan of protest, wheels cracking alarmingly on the cobbles. The guards shouted orders, commandeering more and more passers-by to help move the unwieldy shape.

With a sudden flash of inspiration, Cat hurried forward to help. Any time now, guards would be combing the streets looking for her. The last place they would be expecting her to be was in the crowd moving the Devil-box. Let the guards search the city; this way, she would know exactly where the TARDIS was being held, and with any luck, would be able to lose herself as soon as they were inside the cathedral walls. It was a plan worthy of the Doctor himself.

With the first glimmer of hope she had felt in hours, Cat put her shoulder to the back of the wagon and heaved with all her strength.

The Doctors world swam back into focus as he struggled to shake off the numbing effects of the tranquilliser that had flooded his system. He ran his tongue over his parched lips. There was a bitter taste in his mouth, a trace of the drug they had used.

Terelexin.

A shrill voice cut across the room.

Unpleasant for a while, but harmless, I assure you.

The Doctor opened his eyes. The Grand Inquisitor was seated opposite him, watching him with faint amusement. Unpleasant and unnecessary, said the Doctor There was no need to drug me. I wont allow you to spread your perfidies among these simple, faithful people, Time Lord. These simple, faithful people were going to burn me as a witch. But you are a witch. The Pope has declared all Time Lords to be witches.

The Inquisitor pulled the stopper from a crystal decanter and poured a generous quantity of deep red wine into a tall, slender goblet. The Doctor tugged experimentally at the bonds that held him to the chair. His eyes flicked around the room. The craft was a gaudy mix of high technology and high church. Plastisteel bulkheads draped with heavy tapestries; deck-plates lined with deep carpets; art and jewellery and sculpture ranged amongst airlock controls and power relays. The chair to which he was strapped was of ornately carved mahogany, but the shackles that bound his wrists crackled and flickered as energy from a force-field generator coursed through them.

Now that you have me safely tucked away from the eyes of your… flock, is there any need to keep me restrained?

Oh, yes, I think so. The Inquisitor took a sip of his wine. Yours is a particularly resourceful race. I know only too well what trouble you might cause.

What do you know of my race? The Doctor was puzzled.

All in good time, uh, Time Lord.

Doctor.

Doctor. All in good time. For the moment, all you need to know is that I am Guii del Toro, Grand Inquisitor for all of this sector of Roman Catholic space, working under special dispensation from His Holiness Pope John Paul XXIII, and that you and your ship your TARDIS are now in my custody.

The Doctor frowned. Youve been visited by a TARDIS before, havent you?

Del Toro pursed his lips. The… event that took place here left deep scars in the minds of these people, and alerted us to the presence of your race. Sadly, it also left us with no more than the remains of a useless and broken time machine a few twisted fragments that survived the molecular break down which is now stuck in a Vatican

vault.

The Doctor had already suspected from the few snippets of information hed gleaned from the frightened populace that a malfunctioning TARDIS had landed on this planet.

The fact that it had been totally destroyed indicated a catastrophic failure of the failsafe procedures. The dimensional forces held check by the vast engines of a TARDIS were of a staggering magnitude. If the dimensional barriers had failed …

Why are you here, Doctor? del Toro asked lightly.

Im on holiday, said the Doctor.

A Time Lord, holidaying here, on Haven? Even if I believed you, the insult alone would be enough to condemn you to death.

Yes, well I wasnt aware

Silence! the Inquisitor barked. You are my prisoner on my ship. You are alone, save for a single girl, and she will soon be in my custody. Your TARDIS will be brought aboard, dismantled and analysed.

You wont have much luck getting into it.

Oh, we will, Doctor. You will give us the access codes.

The Doctor snorted. Do you really think so?

Sixteen months has been ample time for me to learn how co-operative a Time Lord can be when encouraged.

The occupants of that TARDIS…

… have been most forthcoming with their information, though it has been of limited practical use since their ship was so spectacularly destroyed.

What have you done to them?

Del Toro pressed a small control panel on the desk before him.

See for yourself, Doctor.

Cat forced herself to bite her lip as one of the guards pushed her sharply in the back. Keeping her eyes firmly fixed on the floor and her

shawl pulled tightly around her face, she heaved on the rough rope, tucking herself amongst the straining mass of bodies that struggled to raise the TARDIS from the back of the cart.

It had been back-breaking work getting the police box from the square below. The cobbled entranceway to the cathedral had been steep and slippery, and the cart dangerously overloaded. Gradually, by sheer weight of numbers, they had managed to get the TARDIS through the cathedral doors.

Once inside the quiet stillness of the cathedral, the cart had been unhitched from its exhausted animals and the unwilling workforce roped into their place. Scurrying priests had cleared a passageway through the central nave, and the doors to a secluded chamber had been unlocked.

Now they were trying to manhandle the TARDIS through a narrow passageway, spurred on by the shouts of the guards and the nervous cries of the priests. Cat kept her head down, waiting for any opportunity to break from the group. The cathedral was huge; a great dark tangle of openings and passageways. She should have no problem concealing herself, if only she could slip away unseen.

There was a sudden cry of alarm as one of the guide ropes lashed around the TARDISs wooden shell gave way with a sharp crack. People scattered in all directions as the huge blue box toppled forward off the cart, crashing to the floor with a deafening thump. There was a scream of pain from one of the guards. His comrades-in-arms hurried forward, and Cat seized her chance.

Ducking around the back of the cart, she darted from the passageway, keeping tight to the shadow-flecked walls. Tentatively she eased her way back out into the vast open space of the cathedral. Figures slipped through the quiet gloom, some casting concerned looks towards her, startled by the noise and cries of pain. Keeping her movements calm and unhurried, Cat made her way slowly towards the altar. Running now would achieve nothing. She had noticed several passageways leading off from the rearmost wall. Long, dark, pillared cloisters ideal for her to keep out of sight.

With any luck, she would be able to find a crypt or vestibule; somewhere dark and quiet, away from prying eyes.

She cursed under her breath as the Bishop and several of his priests emerged from one of the passageways, muttering in low, concerned

voices. Bowing her head, Cat turned on her heel, skirting the front of the altar, edging her way between the ranks of wooden pews. She would have to try the passageway on the other side of the central aisle.

Abruptly, a coarse voice broke the stillness of the building. Barked orders from one of the soldiers to his colleagues. Armed men started to make their way down the nave.

Cats heart leapt in her chest. Surely they couldnt have spotted her? Not yet …

Trying to keep her panic under control, she stared around for somewhere to hide. In the shadows of the wall ahead of her were rows of wooden doors. Confessionals. With slow, measured steps, Cat made her way towards one of the delicately carved boxes, opened the door and slipped gratefully inside.

Through the filigree of carvings she watched as half a dozen of the soldiers hurried down the passageway from which she had just escaped. They emerged moments later with their injured colleague hoisted between them. The mans foot was a bloody mess, and his groans of pain echoed throughout the cavernous cathedral, to the irritation of the Bishop and his entourage. Cat nodded in satisfaction. It was the guard who had been treating them so roughly.

Serves you bloody well right, she murmured.

Hardly a charitable sentiment.

Cat jumped, scrabbling for the door latch.

Theres no need for alarm. You act as if you need sanctuary, and I will certainly not deny you that.

The voice was old and mellow. Cat could make out the figure of a man on the other side of the screen. She struggled to see his features, but the candlelight kept his face in darkness. Cat tightened her shawl, keeping her own face hidden, her voice muffled. There was an accident. One of the guards got hurt. I was frightened. Frightened, but not very sympathetic. The voice was tinged with amusement. The man was a thug. Cat felt herself bristle. Hed been given a bit of power and it had gone to his head. The secular arm of the Inquisition. Most seek to avoid their gaze.

Aware that she was being drawn into a conversation that she didnt

have time for, Cat eased open the door of the confessional. Ive got to go.

And where will you go? Ive a stall. In the marketplace, Cat blustered. Ive got to go and see to that.

Ah, a stall holder. The voice was thoughtful. Strange, since from your clothes I would have taken you for one of the prairie folk, who are not permitted to own stalls in the marketplace.

Cat let out a heavy breath.

Look, uh, Father whats going on?

In what

sense?

Well all this… cathedrals in space stuff. Priests in spaceships.

How

else would they travel?

But… this is the future! Surely people dont still believe…

In God? In the Holy Trinity? Christs sacrifice? Look around you, my dear.

Theyve taken my friend aboard their ship.

Yes… I heard talk. A Time

Lord.

Yes.

Thats very bad. He coughed slightly. Oh, Im sorry. I meant no offence. That is… I take it youre also… Im not a Time Lord, no, said Cat.

Im human. From Earth. Ah. It is many years since I visited Earth… Or Rome, he added sadly.

Look This guy, Cat concluded, had only half his marbles. My friend… in the ship… Ah… yes, yes, your friend. I will do what I can for him,

but a Grand Inquisitor answers only to the Pope. I fear my poor prayers have never stayed the hand of Milord Guii del Toro.

Its not prayers I need, its a way into that ship! Can you help me or not? she demanded, respectfully adding, uh… Father, a moment later.

She heard the old man behind the grille chuckle.

You are Roman Catholic, my child.

I… yes. Cat smiled and quivered slightly with the intensity of the memory. She couldnt even recall when shed last given the Church any thought at all. Her first communion…Yes. But I havent been to church in years. She shook herself.

Father… what will they do to him?

Grand Inquisitor del Toro is a devious, avaricious, manipulative hypocrite may the Lord forgive my passing judgement. His motives are invariably bad, but like the Evil One himself he moves in ways that are difficult to discern, let alone foresee.

And he has a vicious streak. All of this makes him very difficult to predict.

And very bad news for the Doctor. Ive got to get him out of there. I need to find a way onto the ship.

In order to do what? You would be arrested immediately by the guards, or possibly even shot. Your friend will not thank you for an act of futile heroism.

Ive got to do something, Father.

They also serve, who only stand and wait.

Pardon?

Milton. An English poet. You can do nothing for your friend, child… except remain here and pray.

I havent prayed in years, Father. Im not really sure I believe in it any more.

She paused, thoughtful. Certainly not since travelling with the Doctor. Ive seen too much.

What have you seen, child?

Things that make the Bible look like kids stuff. The Doctors taken me to a factory where they make artificial black holes. Machines do it. Built by men!

Often men try to imitate Gods works, but seldom his wisdom or his compassion.

Ive seen a lot of killing, too, Cat said quietly. A whole army, blasted to pieces. They werent recognisable as people afterwards. Just meat and blood. Thats all we are.

Every one of those people was a soul going through its final agony and breaking through to God.

No, Father. I saw bodies fly in all directions, but not souls.

You have seen perhaps too much, child. Your friend, the Time Lord…

The Doctor. We travel together. Hes got a nose for trouble.

Where did you meet this Time Lord?

I… Cat trailed off instantly. This was stupid.

Earth. Of course, it had to have been on Earth.

You dont sound too sure.

Earth. Definitely. It all just happened so fast. I was a kid in Liverpool, then I moved to London. Wheres it all gone?

What, my child?

The time… She shook her head. This isnt helping the Doctor. Please youre a priest, Father… cant you… talk to the Bishop or something? Agatho?

I think not… No, indeed. But I shall do what I can, I shall do what I can.

Cat heard the old priest opening the latch on his booth.

What is your name, child?

Catherine… People call me Cat.

Do not leave the cathedral, Catherine, he said. You will be safe in here.

How will I find you?

Oh, I am always here, he replied. Usually at prayer. God be with you, my child.

Thank you, Father, said Cat.

She heard him leave the little wooden box and shuffle off. She opened the door of her booth and peered out after him. An old man, frail looking, in a tatty monks habit. What could he possibly do against the Grand Inquisitor and his vast battleship?

Lift doors slid apart with a hum and the Doctor was led out into a long, dark space.

Unlike in the rest of the ship, there was no decorative adornment here, no fine fabrics or expensive ornaments. Stark metal walls lined with heavy doors stretched towards a central chamber.

A blaster was thrust painfully into the Doctors back. Out of sight of the populace, all pretence of the theatrical had been abandoned. Swords and spears had been quickly exchanged for blasters and energy-beam rifles.

Where are we going? the Doctor asked. The torture chamber?

The cargo hold, Doctor, del Toro replied. He coughed politely. Although I am using it as a makeshift torture chamber at the moment, yes. I have a rather special piece of equipment, which will not fit inside my conventional chambers.

Did they send the wrong-sized iron maiden? the Doctor sneered.

Del Toro gestured around him. Aboard this ship, Doctor, my investigative powers have absolutely free rein. You would do well to remember that.

Ive met your kind before, the Doctor snapped. Many times. The toenail-pullers.

You sicken me.

More than just a toenail-puller, I assure you. Del Toro opened a small window in one of the doors and peered through it. You are a very

special guest here, Doctor. I hope you will be as helpful to me as was the last of your kind.

At the Inquisitors bidding, the Doctor was thrust forward, out of the corridor and into the chamber beyond. It was a huge, steel cathedral of a place, the granite-grey bulkheads of which stretched high into the workings of the ship. With a shock, the Doctor felt the familiar telepathic tingle that accompanied close contact with any of his own people. A trace of a Time Lord mind. A mind already at the point of death.

He looked about him, and closed his eyes in disbelief.

Against one wall was a gigantic machine, the purpose of which the Doctor could not begin to guess at. Twin metal girders, as black as coal and as thick at oak trees, jutted upward from the deck, intersecting with a huge horizontal beam suspended from the ceiling high above.

Whether intentional or not, the device resembled a cross.

There was a figure hanging from it. A Time Lord, already dead. Just an after-sense. A flicker of pain. A jumble of painful regenerations. A stampede towards oblivion.

What did you do to him?

Exhausted his usefulness. I shall try to take better care with you.

Tubes had been clamped onto the Time Lords gaunt torso. They snaked between cross-struts, through a tangle of holographic cables and out to a squat, black plinth with a goldfish-globe top. Greenish-grey liquids squirted around the tubes and oozed in and out of the bowl, flooding the circuitry within.

It looked to the Doctor like a very crude time rotor.

Your people are criminals on this world, Doctor, del Toro said. Mass-murderers.

Here, this is justice.

All this in the name of God.

All this because it is necessary! The Church is spreading like a bloody rash over these backward systems. There has been no plan no

guidance. Just endless damned monks tramping around the cosmos recruiting souls for Jesus.

I would have thought that was the point.

Its causing chaos. These places are too remote from Rome. They are all going their own way doctrinally. Bishops and local rulers are getting involved. Do you know, two worlds are currently at war over the correct thickness of the communion wafer? There are three rival Popes. We, the Holy Inquisition

ride around the galactic rim like outlaws, spreading terror and murdering innocents. You are a monster, said the Doctor. And all my life I have fought monsters. Youre no different from any of them.

Perhaps I am a monster… Del Toro suddenly and painfully gripped the Doctors chin. I know a thousand different ways of inflicting pain upon you, Time Lord, a thousand different ways of getting the information I seek; and if you prove to be resilient, then I will take you to the very brink of death and watch you regenerate.

He released his grip on the Doctor, smiling in satisfaction at the shock on his face.

So your machine can force a Time Lord to regenerate?

Del Toro smiled in triumph. That is… one of its functions.

The Doctor looked del Toro straight in the eye. And the other?

Enough prattle, Doctor. I have found that the first few hours of a new incarnation is the perfect time for me to conduct my investigations. Post-regenerative trauma is a useful ally. Struggle against me all you wish in this body, Doctor. Your future selves will tell me all that I wish to know.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Cathedral was sparking memories in Cat, like rediscovered snapshots. Funny she hadnt thought about her Catholic childhood for years. Her favourite childhood cousin had become a priest. When had she last seen him? She couldnt remember.

She recalled finding church boring as a child, but always enjoying visits to the big cathedrals though this was the first time shed been trapped in one. She tried to clear her mind and think of a plan. She wandered the cloisters, the dark crypt, the many side-chapels, the choir. She even sat through a service.

She wondered about the old man in the black habit. She caught sight of him again as he passed briefly through a cloister at the far end of the nave, where two priests bowed to him and addressed him, in tones of the deepest respect, as Venerable Father.

Whos the old man? she asked a young priest.

Thats Father Julian, the priest said. The Sublime and Venerable Patriarch of the Spinward Clusters. Or he was. He has abandoned the material world for that of the spirit. He lives as a simple Benedictine now.

A Patriarch… Thats… quite high up, isnt if?

She recalled as a young child always getting confused about who was who in the Church. The Pope she knew, of course… and God… but all the bishops and cardinals and whatnot …

The priest smiled and pointed towards the ceiling.

Higher than the cardinals, he said. In ancient times, they used to be thought co-equal with the Holy Father himself.

Whats he like?

Father Julian? Oh, hes a very great man, said the young priest. Hes retired now, of course, but hes been more revered than ever since he turned his back on the world and came to Haven. Even here, in this house of wonders, he is the brightest ornament.

That gave Cat hope. He must be able to help the Doctor.

In place of the dead Time Lord, the Doctor was now pinned to the Grand Inquisitors great crucifixion machine, shoulders, wrists and feet. Wires nipped and tubes bit under the skin of his neck, face and head, encouraged there by a variety of automated robotic arms.

Across from the Doctor, Guii del Toro stood at the goldfish-bowl control unit and rested his hands tantalisingly on a lever.

Say goodbye to yourself, Time Lord, said del Toro, smiling. As my machine…

encourages you to regenerate, so the data we record will be of immense use to me.

Three feet below the Doctors dangling feet, wheels and cogs began to grind. He suddenly felt the wires in his skin bite. The skin of his head felt tight, stretched across his skull.

His skull seemed to be expanding. Memories crowded out temporal flotsam, other selves, old friends, old enemies and tumbled away into the sudden distance.

Behind him a voice whispered. Puccini…

Future memories. They tugged at him.

The voice whispered again. It sounded youthful, warm light, yet calm and reassuring. He could almost make out words.

He felt a warm breath on his neck.

So close …

He was fighting the urge to look around.

Through the chaos of his memories, he could see del Toro making adjustments to the machine.

With a jolt, he began to experience another, more alarming sensation. It was as if the wires were sucking something out of him and trying to force something else in.

He felt at the same time drained and stuffed to exploding with…

himself. This machine was more than just a device of torture… much more.

He struggled to remain conscious. He had responsibilities. Cat… What would happen to her? What would the Inquisition do to her if they found her? He was vaguely aware of a guard approaching the Inquisitor.

Lord, the Cardinal is here, the guard said.

Good, said the Inquisitor. He should see this. Bring him in

The Cardinal is already in, milord del Toro. Another voice, high and petulant and used to being obeyed. And he has no wish to see this, thank you. Turn that thing off.

The Inquisitor paused. As your eminence commands, he said at last, bowing.

No longer able to see, the Doctor heard the sound of dying machinery. The dreadful tug of war that had threatened to rip his mind from his body began to subside.

He focused on the new arrival tall, gaunt, old and proud looking, and dressed from head to foot in a cardinals dazzling red.

Is this the witch that you dragged me out here to see? I was on my way to Rome, man!

Eminence, this one is a Time Lord.

I see…

And on this planet, of all of them…

I know, I know…

His Holiness has commanded

The man who styles himself John Paul XXIII has not issued a command or spoken a word since brain-death, the Cardinal snapped.

But it was clearly established in the reign of His Holiness Pope Sixtus

The Cardinal hissed with contempt; the Inquisitor continued.

 that soul-death occurs five to seven years after brain-stem activity ceases. Until that sad event occurs, the throne is not vacant. It is almighty God who makes the rules, milord.

Very well, very well. What do you expect me to do?

Witness the interrogation. As a representative of the Curia, you have no choice.

If by the Curia you mean Bonaventure and his gang of Frenchmen, hovering like vultures around John Pauls corpse

There is only one Curia, milord.

There are two, said the Cardinal tartly. Three, if you include what that maniac in the Magellanic Clouds has been doing in the name of our Saviour. We of the Holy Inquisition are in the vanguard of the fight to reestablish orthodoxy.

You merely profit from the chaos, del Toro. Now, get what you need from this man and let me be on my way.

The Inquisitor turned to address the Doctor. Time Lord. We have a distinguished guest. Please forgive the delay whist I reset the instruments.

The Doctor tried to say something, but no words came out. He could no longer feel his body. His vision was clear of memory fragments now. The torture chamber seemed unusually bright.

Look at him, the Cardinal snapped. Hes quite unconscious

The process takes a few days, Eminence!

A few days! I dont have the time, man! John Paul is dead or his soul dying! The conclave is assembling! You know what is at stake! War across Christendom! He drew in an angry breath. I know what youre trying to do, del Toro. And your ambitions…

I wont be delayed here. You will just have to take him down and use more traditional methods. You have one hour, whilst I pay my respects to Patriarch Julian.

The old man had been gone too long, and Cats anxiety about the Doctor hadnt abated.

Shed seen him in difficult scrapes before, but this was different. This was too close to home. To her, the Catholic Church was an authority that couldnt be resisted. A bit frightening, really an undercurrent of absolute, stern authority and veiled menace underlay it all. Her

mother had been devout, and her father had let her get on with it. Even her mothers hairbrush to the back of the head routine (when, for example, shed flooded the kitchen) had seemed to be delivered with papal authority. Maybe thats why shed blanked it from her mind, buried her childhood memories.

But she hadnt been an unhappy child, she was sure …

She hadnt given her parents any thought in years she didnt even know where they were. Still in Liverpool, she supposed. Shed upped and gone to London as soon as she could get away. Then it all went a bit hazy …

And now she was on the other side of the galaxy, and her only remaining friend was probably dead.

Ah, there you are, child.

The old Patriarchs voice snapped her out of her reverie.

Father, she cried, rather too loud. Did you… ?

She could see from his face that he didnt have good news for her.

Im sorry, my dear. The Grand Inquisitor sent me his apologies via an intermediary.

He says hes in a sub-space conference with Rome. Which is a lie. He had to say something to avoid seeing me. A certain… protocol… still attaches to my former labours for the Church.

So you didnt see him?

No. And what I learned from one of the servants gives us little cause for optimism, I fear. Del Toro is in his ship playing with some new toy, and your friend is with him.

Toy?

His filthy instruments of interrogation. No human has ever resisted del Toro, and I doubt a Time Lord could either

But the Doctors done nothing wrong!

He is a Time Lord. That is excuse enough for del Toro… Not that he needs an excuse.

I dont know what Id do without the Doctor, said Cat in a low, tremulous whisper.

Hes… all Ive got.

The old man lay a comforting hand on her shoulder and raised it to brush her cheek.

No tears now, said Father Julian.

Cat pulled away. I dont cry, she said, flashing the old priest a glance.

I am truly sorry, child. I will pray for your friend. Even the fate of Time Lords is in the hand of the Almighty.

The Doctor was beyond help. His body hung insensible on the black wall, but he was not inside it. The machine had done something… split him from his body. He was drifting slowly through the ship, dazzled by light that had no source. Voices rose and fell like waves in a lazy sea. People shone with energy some brightly, some dully, each with his or her own peculiar tone of light.

None of them could see or hear him.

He floated, it seemed, at random, through the ships massive engine rooms and even more massive kitchens, then up into Guii del Toros luxurious quarters, where he watched the Inquisitor raising a glass of dark wine in a silent, grimly satisfied toast, and out through the ships bulkhead, into the market square. He could touch nothing and no one, he passed through solid objects, he could not control the rate or direction of his drift.

He was heading towards the Cathedral, thinking absently about how it looked centuries old. It couldnt have been there longer than thirty years probably less.

The solid stone walls were as diaphanous as air to him, and he passed within.

There was Cat, sitting, head bowed, in the front row of pews, before the high altar.

She looked so sad. So alone. The Doctor wanted to reach out to her. To tell her he was sorry. At the foot of the altar, two men were kneeling in prayer. One was the red-robed Cardinal. The other was a good twenty years older, and dressed in what appeared to be the habit

of a Benedictine monk.

The silence was suddenly shattered by an explosion of noise a side-door crashed open and a black figure rushed through it. A monk. He ran forward, straight at the Cardinal.

No! Cat leaped forward.

The Doctor tried to cry out, but found that he had no voice. He tried to will himself to move forward, but merely began to drift backwards, back through the wall.

He saw the Cardinal flailing at the monk with a free-standing gilded cross. The monk batted it aside and then struck the Cardinal to the cathedral floor with a single blow. The Doctor saw the Cardinals light die like a candle snuffed out by fingers.

Cat froze.

The old monk was only just realising what was happening. He crossed himself and slumped to the floor, muttering frantically about the Antichrist. The attacker regarded him for a moment, then turned and ran back the way he had come.

The cathedral fell silent again, save for the old mans fevered prayers.

The Doctor found it so difficult to concentrate… Had someone been killed? It seemed so long ago.

The sun was going down to the east of the ramshackle city. Lamps were being lit. The Doctor had drifted far from the town square, out over darkening fields. He was forgetting where he was …

The cathedral was lit up like a beacon in the advancing night. He could hear music coming from within, carrying over the benighted rooftops.

He felt himself slipping from consciousness if you could call this consciousness.

The limbo of light and muted sound was starting to engulf him. He tried to focus on the light, on the music. Singing …

It seemed to gain in clarity. He was drifting so slowly back towards the town.

Allegris Miserere…

Concentrate…

Cat was in chains. Del Toro had decreed that she should be there to reflect upon her crime. It was a requiem mass in the cathedral for the late Cardinal Runciman. She was under arrest for his murder.

She had been found trying to revive Father Julian. Del Toro had immediately had her manacled and thrown into a cell.

The service dragged. She was thinking about the Doctor. Del Toro had laughingly confirmed Father Julians prediction he was dead. And she would soon follow him to wherever the Devil had sent him.

Agatho, the fat Bishop, preached the sermon. He eulogised Cardinal Runciman as a great shepherd of the flock, a dreadful loss to the Church. Cat thought the Bishop had been drinking.

Next to Agatho in chains! was the TARDIS, which was periodically struck with a mitre whilst Agatho railed against Time Lord witches and murderers. He warned the congregation to be vigilant for strangers and to report them to the cathedral, or they would answer to the Inquisition. His gaze kept flashing to del Toro, who occasionally, almost imperceptibly, nodded his approval.

The choir exalted the Cardinals soul to heaven, and Cats chains bit into her wrists. She was tired. She longed for the service to end.

She was aware of a muttering behind her, and a slight drop in the temperature of the cathedral. The mutters became raised voices, and some women screamed.

Cat twisted in her chains, to see a pale, smoky figure, semi-translucent, float slowly down the aisle towards the altar, its arms raised as if in supplication. A guard stepped up to bar its path and the wraith passed through him.

It was the Doctor … He floated up to the pulpit … he seemed to be reaching for the Bishop. Agatho fell to his knees, sweating and trembling. My God! We are undone! he cried. The sin was not mine…

The Devils work! someone in the congregation shouted, and others shouted back in agreement. People were starting to get to their feet, pushing towards the doors. Pews were toppled over, people fell, were trampled. At a nod from Guii del Toro, the guards tried to corral the panicking crowd, but to no avail.

Cat strained to see past the jostling, pushing bodies of the faithful, to catch a glimpse of the Doctor. She saw him float up to the TARDIS, then vanish. The ghost was gone.

The Doctor came round in a cell that could have belonged to any age. Crude metal walls, no light, no sound. He called out, but heard only the echo of his own voice in reply. He felt forgotten.

What had happened up there on that awful machine? Where had he been? He had felt his… consciousness ripped out, blown about the planet like so much dust. Clawing his way back had been so hard… He still felt far from his old self.

Is that what they had done to the other Time Lord? Again and again exploring, analysing and then stripping his regenerations away …

The cell door opened and a guard beckoned for him to come out. He crawled through the hatch and into the dim light of the corridor.

What ? The guard grabbed him roughly by the arm and began jerking him down the corridor. Where are we? Look, you dont have to be so…

He was pushed through a door and fell at the feet of Guii del Toro. Next to him, held tightly by a guard, was Cat.

Relief flooded across her face. She tried to reach out for him, but the guard held her back.

Doctor! I thought you were dead. I saw you…

For a while, I thought I was dead. He smiled up at her weakly. How are you, Cat?

Cat struggled from her guards grip.

Doctor, theres been a murder!

The Cardinal Archbishop of the Southern Rimworlds was struck down while at prayer at the high altar, del Toro cut in levelly.

A murder in the cathedral… The Doctor nodded slowly. Yes… I think I might have seen it. My memories are still very vague.

So you admit you were there.

In a sense, yes. Not my corporal body, of course. You had that.

We have already seen that you can send your spirit from your body at will.

That was your machine, the Doctor grumbled. It nearly killed me. Nearly forced me to regenerate.

A shame that it didnt, said del Toro. Cardinal Runciman might still be alive.

If you had any grasp of the technology you use against your victims you would realise the impossibility of my

Doctor, you are not here to debate your guilt or innocence. You are here to give me information, and sate the hunger of the faithful. Philippo here saw you arrive in your Devil-box.

A terrified-looking townsman was pushed forward from the shadows by a guard. He stared at the two prisoners and nodded his head vigorously.

A Time Lord, back on Haven, del Toro continued, the Cardinal Archbishop murdered in his own cathedral and the murderers blasphemous spirit appearing to mock the grieving at prayer. Do you know what they want to do to you, Doctor? If I hadnt brought the girl in here, they would have torn her apart.

So you intend to execute me without hearing what I have to say.

Not just you, Time Lord,. The community of the faithful have condemned you both I am merely their instrument, and Gods.

Who was the other man at prayer with the Cardinal?

No less a figure than the Sublime and Venerable Patriarch Julian.

Perhaps we should hear what he has to say.

He is still… in a state of shock.

Then can I ask that you refrain from breaking out the instruments until we have heard him? Surely even you can appreciate such a basic tenet of civil and canon law. The law has little to say out here, Time Lord,. There is only the Church. Im under the protection of the Church, Cat asserted. Father Julian gave me sanctuary. Here, you enjoy my protection, said del Toro coldly. A priest entered and approached the Grand Inquisitor. He bowed quickly, and said, The

Patriarch is demanding to see you.

Del Toro scowled.

Excellent, said the Doctor. We can all go.

They found the old man praying in one of the ships many small chapels. He turned when he saw them, and struggled to his feet. Cat thought he looked suddenly frail and frightened.

Venerable Father, its very good to see you on your feet again, but are you sure it is wise? del Toro smarmed.

Dont humour me, del Toro, the old man said wearily. You hate me and want me dead, and may God forgive me I desire the same of you. But for the moment we must unite against the common foe. The Antichrist walks among us! I saw him! A monk without a face!

I saw a monk! Cat exclaimed. I… didnt see his face his hood was up.

Any man or woman can hide beneath the monks cowl, said the Inquisitor. What better disguise?

And you, usually so keen to detect the presence of the Evil One, the Patriarch snapped. Then he fell to coughing violently, doubling up with the strain.

Venerable Father, you must not trouble yourself with all this until you are well enough.

No, indeed, the Doctor cut in. If you decide to come with us, you will have the journey to convalesce.

Journey? del Toro snapped.

As I understand it, we stand accused of the murder of a Cardinal at the altar of his cathedral.

You wish to confess?

A faint smile flickered across the Doctors face. I wish to have the case heard by the proper authority. This isnt a matter of doctrine the charge could hardly be more grave. This must be tried by the Pope in Rome.

Patriarch Julian let out a guffaw, then began to cough again.

You claim a privilege of the faithful! snapped del Toro.

The girls a Catholic, said the Patriarch.

And I am an honorary dean of Westminster Abbey, said the Doctor. The Venerable Bede himself put me up.

Time Lord trickery, del Toro snarled.

But correct on a point of law, chuckled the old Patriarch.

But the Pope might even now be dead! Unless youre suggesting we go to the heretic back in Old Rome. Or that abomination in the Magellanic Clouds.

No, we shall go to Rome and hope that the conclave allows itself to be guided for once by the Holy Spirit.

We cant get to Rome! del Toro snapped. This half of the galaxy is on the brink of war. The Magellanic hoards are poised only a few solar systems from here.

Nonsense, nonsense, retorted the Patriarch. Poor Runciman was going himself, before he was struck down. And who would stop a ship of the Holy Inquisition?

The Inquisitor was silent, staring at the floor, looking thunderous.

The Patriarch rubbed his hands together. So many years since I was in Rome, he said with a mix of nostalgia and anticipation. I doubt I shall recognise the place.

CHAPTER FIVE

You will have free run of the Custody Deck, barring any restricted areas or any specific prohibitions from me or from one of my holy brethren. You may find what comfort you may down here. Eminence, you will, of course, be housed in my quarters. I shall find alternative accommodation. Do not be afraid to ask for anything you need. You will find we are quite well provided for in the service of the Lord.

I know, replied the Patriarch. Booty.

Still, he allowed himself to be led away.

What now? Cat asked the Doctor when they were alone.

We relax and enjoy the hospitality of the Church, said the Doctor. The lower decks seemed to consist entirely of pokey, empty cells and locked rooms containing equipment the precise purpose of which Cat didnt want to know. She peered through barred windows at the torture instruments, and shuddered.

The ship was throbbing as the power built up in preparation for its departure. The Doctor had settled himself in a corner and started playing around with the many sets of manacles that hung about the walls. He seemed quite undisturbed by his surroundings, or by recent events.

I still cant get used to people being killed, she said quietly.

You will, Im afraid, the Doctor said gently. I suppose you can get used to anything, over time. He rattled the links. Perhaps even milord Grand Inquisitor had sleepless nights in the past.

Whats he going to do to us?

Hopefully nothing, until we reach Rome.

And then what? We take advantage of the confusion and slip away. The Doctor shuddered. I have no desire to get tied up in another papal conclave.

Guii del Toro sipped his wine and watched a servant take the half-full plate away from his esteemed guest. I must thank you, del Toro. You eat too heartily for me here. Out here among the backworlds we try to recapture a few of the comforts of home, Venerable Father. Do they

eat this well in Rome? The Inquisitor didnt reply. Because I hear it is a very different story on Earth. The people of Earth are schismatics. Any other view is… unwisely expressed. Even by a Patriarch. The Patriarch sighed. We must pray that this conclave heals the many breaches in the Holy Mother Church. Will you be attending, Father?

I am too old, del Toro. I have long-since retired from the world of Roman politics.

I have cleansed myself of the mud, and have no wish to mire myself again.

Once it is known that you are in the Vatican, many will seek your guidance. You will come under great pressure to declare for one of the candidates.

And who would you have me support, del Toro? The Frenchman Bonaventure? Once John Pauls lackey, now his embalmer?

A loyal servant of the legitimate Pontiff.

The Patriarch shook his head impatiently.

What of the other business? The murder. You cant seriously intend to bring the matter to Rome. Not at the present time. You had as well let your prisoners go.

Rome expects us, said del Toro flatly. The spectacle might help to… focus the minds of the conclave. And, of course, there may be another possibility for the Papal chair…

The Patriarchs eyes narrowed.

What do you… ? You? You would stand as a candidate?

Del Toro smiled across the rim of his glass. The Church needs firm leadership, and time to heal. I can offer both. The Patriarch laughed gently. And what makes you think anyone will listen? Del Toro set his glass down on the table.

I will make them listen. With the Time Lord as proof of my loyalty and commitment to the Church. Father Julian shook his head sadly. They will rend him limb from limb!

Agatho, by the Grace of God, Bishop of Braak, sponged his face with

an already-wet napkin and wished the workmen would get on with it. Once again they were shifting the Time Lords transport this time into the cargo hold of the Holy Inquisitions ship, where he had wanted it to go all along. The ship was nearly ready to leave. Agatho was glad he always tried to keep the Holy Inquisition happy and at a distance, sent them the reports from the confessionals and got on with the job of extorting money from the local tradesmen.

His eyes flickered across the huge dark cross of the Inquisitors machine and shuddered. As if on cue, del Toro swept into the chamber. Agatho bowed.

Your Grace. As you see, the Devil-box is almost in place.

Good, good. You know, Im beginning to look forward to this trip.

To Rome? At this time?

My plans have changed, Agatho. Everything is in flux.

What about the Good Shepherd Project?

Del Toro passed a finger across his lips.

Let us say that the Time Lords arrival and His Eminences tragic murder have given us pause for thought.

But what about me? What am I supposed to do? Braak is in uproar! You must leave me some of your guard.

There was a rising bass rumbling somewhere deep beneath them.

Get that thing into a stasis field, the Grand Inquisitor barked.

Whats happening? Were taking off!

Youre coming with us to Rome.

Me? I cant go there!

Youre not reliable, Agatho. Youre a coward and a fool, and I want you where I can see you.

The Bishop groaned and fell to his knees.

Spare me, Grand Inquisitor! he cried.

Get up, said del Toro flatly. You sicken me. Days. There was nothing to do. The Doctor and Cat had chatted for a long while. He had talked about his past, his foes, his previous travelling companions.

What happened to them? Cat had asked.

Most left, the Doctor had replied. Settled down to more… stable lives.

Do you ever see them?

Rarely. You know me chaos follows in my wake. It hardly seems fair to inflict all that on them again.

I bet theyd love it.

The Doctor sighed. Cat, some died.

Oh, Im sorry. Well, dont worry. She placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

Ill try to stay alive.

The Doctor smiled and patted her hand affectionately.

Doctor, she asked after a while, can I ask you something? Its about my life before I hooked up with you.

Yes…

Its just… there seem to be gaps. Stuff I cant remember. I mean what sort of a state was I in when we met? Its all kind of a blur.

I often have that effect on people, said the Doctor, a frown dancing across his brow. We need a holiday. After we get out of this little mess…

Yes, but…

Cat, the Doctor interrupted gently, try not to think about it. Im sure everything will come back to you once things… settle down. Now I need to rest for a while.

And with that he had closed his eyes and as far as Cat could see gone straight to sleep.

Cat had wandered the blank, dim corridors, peered in pokey cells at nightmarish equipment and felt grateful that there appeared to be

(with the possible exception of themselves) no one to torture.

Shed found a lift, but it wasnt working. She doubted thered be anybody down to fix it in a hurry. Apart from herself and the Doctor, the occasional silent priest, passing like a ghost, and the guard who brought their food, the deck was deserted.

Or so Cat had assumed. Now she wasnt so sure. Sometimes, at the furthest extremity of the ship, out beyond the rows of tiny cells, she thought she could hear the grinding of machinery, accompanied by long, high screams.

She put the barely audible clamour down to her imagination working overtime in the silence and stillness. But, still, at certain times and in certain parts of the ship …

The Doctor was no use. He never stirred. He was breathing, and looked peaceful, if uncomfortable. She wondered how anyone could sit cross-legged for so long.

She wondered if the ship was haunted. The tormented spirits of those tortured to death on del Toros machines… Father Julians faceless monk… the Doctor floating like a cloud through the cathedral… Shed seen enough recently to convince herself that ghosts were real.

She shook her head what was it about the Church and death, and what happened after death? Everything here seemed to revolve around it.

It surprised her that she had once believed it all. She suddenly recalled being asked, as a little girl, what she wanted to be when she grew up. Her reply had been instant a nun.

Had she lost it all? The belief? Had she ever really believed it? She remembered it now as fact, not as faith, and it didnt seem to suit her at all. She wished Father Julian would come and visit.

Finally her boredom overcame her fear of the dark and she plunged into the gloom.

Every slight shift or groan of the ship in flight set Cats nerves on edge. She strained to hear the terrible sounds of torture. Nothing. She went further, deeper into the bowels and workings of the ship. Hello? she called out timidly. Is anybody down here? They must be going through some sort of turbulence. The distant clang

of the hull sounded to Cat like ripping metal. Like the roaring of some great machine. Screams carried on the wind …

She froze. That was it the sound.

She edged out around a bend in the corridor. She wasnt sure she could go any further.

A scream again; chilling, more of a drawn-out whine of agony. It didnt sound human.

And then, over the industrial grind and the unearthly screams, another voice. Human.

Male. And singing.

All things bright and beautiful…

Accompanied by a low groan of pain and despair. Cat felt sick.

She forced herself forward into the gloom, following the nightmare sounds. All creatures great and small… The corridor ended in a door not locked. Slowly she turned the

handle, inched open the door and peered into the black slit.

All things wise and wonderful…

It was the hold. The cacophony was coming from the back, up towards the roof. As Cat walked slowly forward, the tumult died down, collapsing into a dying groan of machinery that drowned out everything else. The Lord God… Cat could see light at the back of the room. A grille, set near the ceiling. She could see a pair of feet through it.

…made…

She edged forward in the sudden, unnerving silence. On the far wall of the cavernous chamber hung a cross, huge and black, wires and tubes snaking down from it through the deck-plates of the ship. Cat stared up at the cross, goosebumps on her skin.

There was something not right here. Something twisted.

Eyes on the cross and not on her feet, Cat tripped on one of the plastic container crates that littered the dark room. The box tipped, spilling out its loose consignment of chains.

Whos there?

A light a torch shone through the grille, and into Cats eyes. She froze.

Who are you? a mans voice asked.

She didnt reply.

Its all right, Im not going to hurt you.

Im Cat Broome, she said timidly.

She could just make out a young man clad in blue overalls, squatting, peering down at her.

Actually, weve met before, he said.

We have?

In Saint Saviours Cathedral, in Braak. You were asking me about Father Julian.

Thats right! But you were dressed as a priest then. I am a priest, he said. But there are other ways to serve God, off ones knees. What are you doing up there?

Repairs. Maintenance. When we met in the cathedral, I was merely visiting as a tourist, you might say. Ive been wanting to see Saint. Saviours for years. I remembered you because of the question you asked me about Patriarchs. I used to get confused about them as a child.

Really! exclaimed Cat. Me too! I sort of used to mix them up with the

Old Testament Patriarchs, the priest cut in.

Yes! exclaimed Cat. How did you know?

Me too, he grinned. Im Father OHearne. But please call me Paddy. Are you a prisoner?

I suppose so. Theyre calling me a witch.

Oh dear, said Paddy.

Im not, though.

Paddy leaned forward, his face close to the grille.

Between you and me, Im not sure I believe in witches.

In an undistinguished chapel on one of the lower decks, a man knelt at prayer. He was further from home than he had ever dreamed of being, in the presence of sorcery and murder and the Holy Inquisition. He was being taken to Rome to publicly accuse a witch, and he was terrified.

Philippo had not left the chapel since the ship had taken off, although he had been allotted quarters larger and more comfortable than his whole familys hut in Braak.

He had touched none of the food provided for him. He was fasting.

Who would mind the stall? His wife had to look after the babies. Who would feed and groom the kreekg? Who would fetch the supplies?

Worry had given way to fear, and then to despair.

A servant of the Inquisition had talked to him on the first day. Terrified, he had lashed out, demanded to be taken home, threatened the mans life, may God forgive him! After that they had left him to his mortifications.

He had never been further than the Prax Hills, where the pa-arteks grazed. Now he was travelling through space. He thought he was going mad.

He asked God over and over again why he had been torn from his life so suddenly. He continually begged the Blessed Virgin to intervene on his behalf, to take him home.

He heard footsteps behind him.

My Lord Bishop! he exclaimed, rising to his feet.

Get out, said Agatho. I wish to pray.

Hear my confession, Your Grace! How have I sinned? I dont want to die out here!

Find someone else to hear your confession! Agatho snapped.

Then send me a priest!

Agatho seemed to hesitate.

I will hear your confession, he said. But who will hear mine?

Philippo fell again to his knees and grasped the Bishops robes. Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been three days since my last confession. Father… where are we?

We are in hell, Philippo, the Bishop replied.

So why did you become a priest? Cat asked her new friend, with more than a hint of regret in her voice.

Father Paddy thought for a moment, and shrugged his shoulders. I think the Holy Spirit must have called me very hastily, he said. I have no recollection of being particularly devout as a child. My mother, yes, but not the rest of us. I used to duck off church to go swimming in the summer.

Me too! Cat cried. Blundell Sands!

Yes!

We probably met there as children! Cat clapped her hands in sudden, childlike delight, then corrected herself. No, silly. We cant have.

There was the little matter of a few centuries in between his time and hers. It was strange she felt she knew him. Perhaps he reminded her a bit of her brother. Not in his face, but his mannerisms. In his body language.

My brothers a priest, she suddenly blurted out.

Her brother was a priest. Why hadnt she remembered that before?

Father… uh…

Paddy, please.

Paddy… I think Im going crazy. I keep forgetting things. Or remembering things Id forgotten. Really big things. She shuddered. There was this old boy my great, great uncle or something who couldnt hold the last five minutes in his head… but at least he was old. She swallowed hard. I swore Id top myself if I ever started to lose my marbles. At least in heaven youd get them back.

Heaven is not for suicides, said Paddy sadly. Life is Gods most

precious gift to us, and to lay it down needlessly is an abomination… though of course to lay it down selflessly for ones fellow men…

And what about those not in his image?

Paddy looked at her blankly. Im not sure that I…

What about creatures other than man? Cat leaned forward, her brow furrowing. Ive seen creatures so different, so alien that they were barely recognisable as life; creatures composed of drifting gas, of crystal and rock, of light and sound; creatures that were so small that their entire race could fit in the palm of my hand.

So many different types…

She looked up at Paddy, despair in her eyes.

Before we came here, I saved the Doctors life. Used dozens of tiny robots to help us escape. And I left them behind, sacrificed them so that we could leave. I killed them! What kind of person does that make me?

But a robot is just a tool.

But these were more than that! Cats voice was urgent. They had intelligence, artificial intelligence; they could think and learn and adapt. Each one of them was individual, unique. Surely thats what it means to be alive? Surely they deserved to be treated as more than tools!

Paddy shook his head. The computer that runs this ship knows the needs of each of us and reacts accordingly. It is intelligent, but it is not alive.

Have you ever heard of the Cybermen? asked Cat.

Paddy shook his head.

We ran into a group of them in the Prenadene asteroid belt. Huge, silver creatures.

Terrifying. They nearly killed us.

Im told the universe is full of such monsters.

But what makes them monsters? The Doctor told me that they were people once. People like you and me. But they removed their

humanity. They took out their hearts and lungs and organs and replaced them with machines. They replaced their brains with computers. They gave up their emotion…

Paddy gave a deep sigh. So many in this universe turn to the extremes of science for their answers when they should turn towards God.

Do you know why they did that to themselves? Cats voice trembled with emotion.

Because they wanted to live! Because their planet was turning more hostile towards them every day and they wanted to live. They didnt want to just lie down and trust in God. They made a choice not to die, not to take the easy, painless way out, and yet you tell me that with every cut of the scalpel, they damned themselves!

Paddy said nothing.

Cat closed her eyes. Im sorry. I dont mean to take it out on you.

Paddy smiled at her. You can take it out on me all you want, if it takes your mind off suicide.

Cat shook her head. I didnt mean that. I dont honestly think Im capable of it.

She smiled back. Lets talk about something else…

Cat? Cat! How long had she been gone? The Doctor consulted his pocket-watch.

Had he really been away that long?

He had been deep inside himself, deep in equilibrium, allowing his personality to reassemble itself after his ordeal at the hands of the Grand Inquisitor.

He should have given more thought to Cat. She could be anywhere.

Cat! he barked. He was conscious of the edge in his voice. Foolish the guards could come for them at any time. She was as safe on her own as she was with him.

Cat would look after herself. He had some serious talking to do. Even on the fringes of papal politics, the Doctor knew, one needed both information and allies, and he intended to garner both.

Cat returned over an hour later, feeling by turns elated and confused. Her head was full of her new friend. He had, of course, refused to try to let her out clearly he wouldnt do anything to defy del Toro but just to hear another civil human voice, to have a proper conversation rather than answer questions and accusations… Besides it was uncanny they had so much in common. Hed jogged so many memories …

Too many. That was the trouble. It was as if she was remembering for the first time who she was… who shed really been before the Doctor had appeared.

Was she recovering from some form of amnesia? Or going mad?

The Doctor would help her. Shed wake him if she had to.

The Doctor wasnt there. Pinned to the makeshift cushion where he had been sitting for the past three days was a note: Gone to see the Patriarch.

His Eminence will be joining us shortly, said Guii del Toro. He asked for this meeting, but in the interests of doctrinal security, he has agreed to allow me to be present.

Very kind of you, said the Doctor. In the meantime, may I ask you a question?

Certainly, said the Grand Inquisitor.

Why do I get the feeling I am being dragged into something much bigger than a simple murder?

What do you mean, Doctor?

Papal politics, more virulent than any I have seen since the days of the Borgias. I am a mere teacher of the truth. I am far from the politics of Rome.

Out here hunting witches. In the 28th Century! Its medieval, superstitious and barbaric!

Superstition. The old battle cry of the rationalists. And yet, as mankind has crossed the star-lanes, all the prejudices of the secular world have broken down.

Witchcraft does exist, out here among the stars.

Science, Grand Inquisitor. Science that you persecute because you dont understand it. Alien science.

Alien science, alien religion, practices so hideous, so inimical to the Gospels…

When the monks began preaching to primitive species, some monstrous ideas from the backworlds began to creep into Catholic space. Some of the new bishops out here on the rimworlds began accepting beast sacrifices to the Lord! One authorised a depiction of Christ as a non-human a crucified alien!

Oh, how monstrous! sneered the Doctor.

There was worse to come. The question of the baptism of non-humanoid species split the Church in two. Did they or did they not have souls?

The Doctor rolled his eyes.

There were riots, civil wars, governments became embroiled and secular authority also fragmented. Fearing for his safety, Pope Athanasius finally left Earth for Rome.

Im sorry? the Doctor cut in. Where is Rome, if not on Earth?

Doctor, Rome is where the Pope is.

Meaning what, exactly?

Del Toro approached the altar and, genuflecting, touched one of a discreet row of buttons set into its surface. A wide, thin screen floated down from the ceiling. The Inquisitor touched another button, and an image filled the screen.

It was a ship of sorts. It looked more like a small moon, but entirely man-made, every inch covered in buildings or immense, shallow glass domes, under which the Doctor could see trees and parklands.

This, said del Toro proudly, is Rome. Is she not a marvel?

And this is where the Pope one of the Popes now rules from?

Del Toro touched another button and the image was enlarged. Under a huge dome that appeared to consist of a single sheet of thin glass, the Doctor could see Saint Peters. Exactly as it was on Earth.

Vatican City, Doctor. A stone-by-stone replica of the original.

Very impressive.

And now, wherever the Holy Father wishes to go, Rome goes with him, secure from attack.

And from proper scrutiny, I would imagine, said the Doctor. A government on the run is no government.

You sound like a schismatic, Doctor. Back on Earth, they refer to the new Rome as Avignon. The new Babylonian captivity. They elected a rival Pope, back in Old Rome.

Of course, he called himself Urban IX; and those who have succeeded him as antipope have also taken the name. Swine!

And now the Pope in this new Rome is dying.

John Paul XXIII, yes. At a time when we desperately need leadership… A year ago, a Scarthian bandit chief called Brotak managed to unite most of the planets in the Magellanic System under his authority. He converted to Roman Catholicism, acclaimed himself Tsar of all the Magellanic Clouds, and, claiming direct authority from the great Constantine, appointed his own… creature… in mockery of the Pope.

Creature?

The Abbot Brrteetk. He calls himself Celestine VI. Del Toros voice rang with disgust. Hes from one of the new monasteries.

Not one of the old boy network, eh?

Doctor, Celestine VI is a highly evolved dolphin from beyond the Rakash Nebula! A dolphin, elevated to the throne of Saint Peter! A wretched fish!

Theyre mammals, said the Doctor.

Pope John Paul has made it an article of faith that dolphins are fish, the Inquisitor spat.

Who knows, said the Patriarch from the doorway, perhaps a pious dolphin might serve the Lord better than an unworthy man.

Father Julian walked to a chair and settled into it, nodding at the

Doctor in greeting. We have long ago learned not to confuse the shape of the body with the shape of the soul, he continued. The fairest of face can be the most monstrous of spirit, as with Lucifer himself the brightest of Gods angels before his fall.

Celestines actions are far fouler than his appearance, said del Toro. He stole a fortune from his own abbey, then bribed and murdered his way into the Magellanic Tsars inner circle. The whole idea of a rival papacy was Celestines, and he paid the Tsar to support it.

Dont worry, Grand Inquisitor, assured the Patriarch. I shall not speak a word in favour of the dolphin. He turned to the Doctor. How are you? It is a pleasure to meet you properly. Young Catherine spoke a great deal about you. Is she not with you?

No, shes gone on one of her walks.

Forgive me for not seeing you sooner. The exertions of the last few days took their toll and I was forced to take to bed. I trust they are treating you well.

I havent really noticed, said the Doctor. I havent been quite myself either.

He shot a withering glance at del Toro. His time in the ships dungeons, his semi-trance, had allowed vague memories of the experience to wash around and solidify, but still he could remember little about the murder. There was something odd, he vaguely recalled, about the monk …

Do you feel able to talk about what happened in Braak Cathedral? the Doctor asked the Patriarch. The murder. Father Julian shivered. Poor Runciman. Yes. Is there anyone who might have wanted to see the Cardinal dead?

Del Toro laughed aloud. About half of Christendom, Doctor. The other half would willingly have died for him. Such are the times we live in.

The Patriarch nodded his agreement. A great and true servant of the Holy Spirit and a political genius, Doctor. Hed have caused some fireworks at the conclave, I have no doubt.

You say you saw the murderer, Father? queried the Doctor.

Yes. The old man grew suddenly agitated. It was the Antichrist. A faceless monk, Doctor! Did you see either Cat or me there? No. I…

became aware of Catherine later. She was holding my head and calling for help. Or trying to falsely establish her innocence, interjected del Toro. Easier than making an escape, perhaps. This monk pressed the Doctor.

What if the Sublime Patriarch did see a faceless monk? del Toro impatiently cut in.

You could easily have conjured some spirit up from hell, clothed in the conveniently concealing garb of a monk. We have already witnessed your powers, Doctor, when you sent your spirit from your body at the late Cardinals mass. That alone is enough to condemn you to death.

Then why drag me all the way to Rome?

The Patriarch slapped his palm impatiently on the altar-rail and began to cough.

Yes, we must leave these matters for Rome, said the Inquisitor soothingly.

Venerable Father, you must return to your bed. You are still far from well.

The Patriarch nodded, trying to catch his breath.

A young priest entered the chapel and whispered something in the Inquisitors ear.

The Inquisitor nodded solemnly and the young priest left.

Gentlemen, del Toro said. His Holiness Pope John Paul is dead.

I thought hed died some time ago, said the Doctor.

Del Toro scowled at the Time Lord.

Doctor, the old Patriarch chided, whatever ones opinions of the man, a legitimate pontiff has been gathered to God. It is not an occasion for sarcasm. Now you must excuse me. I have to go and pray for the Holy Fathers soul. You, del Toro, should do likewise. He began to shuffle towards the exit. Doctor, you are free to come and see me at any time, he said between coughs. Catherine too. I trust that milord del Toro will make the appropriate arrangements.

Of course, said the Inquisitor stiffly, scowling.

Thank you, said the Doctor.

They waited in silence until the old man had gone.

You will burn, Doctor, del Toro snarled. I swear before the Blessed Virgin, you will burn.

That night (assuming in their dungeon that it was night), the Doctor and Cat dined uncomfortably but well, courtesy of Father Julian, who had sent down a large hamper from the Grand Inquisitors table. Cold meats, hot dishes flavoured with strange spices, wine …

Cat ate heartily. She was starving. She talked incessantly between mouthfuls, and more after a glass or two, of wine, recounting her twilight rendezvous with Father OHearne. Paddy.

Its weird. Hes also from Liverpool. His dad also worked for Wirral Borough Council. We have so much in common. Separated only by eight hundred years, said the Doctor, teasing gently. Cat didnt laugh. At first I thought it was fun, but now its starting to

scare me.

Scare you?

Doctor Cat put down her glass if youd asked me a week ago what religion I was, Id swear I couldnt have told you. Theres stuff I still cant remember. Like when I was in London what was I doing? Its all a blank!

I wonder why all this is coming to you now? the Doctor mused to himself.

I think Im going mad! Was I on drugs? Thats the only thing that would make any sense.

No, said the Doctor firmly. You werent.

He flashed a brief, sad smile at her. Cat tried to smile back.

Was she really losing it?

She was scared.

She wanted a hug, like her dad used to …

Her dad… Did she remember her dad? Yes. She did now.

She was really scared.

And yet still comforted by the memory. She wanted the Doctor to hug her like that.

Shed never hugged the Doctor.

And yet now, said the Doctor, if I asked, you would tell me with assurance that youre a good Roman Catholic girl a bit lapsed perhaps. I think they might be projecting false memories into you.

There was no conviction in the Doctors voice. Cat stared at him blankly. Why?

The Doctor shrugged Evangelism?

Cat shook her head. The theory made no sense, and the Doctor knew it.

They were interrupted by a gentle knocking on the bulkhead. A priest was there.

The Venerable Patriarch asks if you wish for anything else.

No, thank you, said the Doctor.

Cat looked up briefly from examining her wine glass as if the content might hold the clue. Her face lit up when she saw who the visitor was.

Paddy! exclaimed Cat.

Im sorry?

Paddy!

Have we met?

Of course weve met! Only a couple of hours ago! And before that in the cathedral!

Im sorry, you must be mistaken. If there is nothing else…

He turned and left.

What was that about? That was Paddy! The priest I was telling you about! Cat could hear the panic in her voice.

The Doctor was scowling. I dont know… he said pensively.

Mass came to an end, and the ships complement of priests and soldiers and those crew and servants who were not on duty filed out of the main chapel. Soon only Grand Inquisitor del Toro, Patriarch Julian and Bishop Agatho were left.

You look unwell, the Patriarch said to Agatho.

His Grace doesnt like space travel, said del Toro with a malicious smile.

You shouldnt have made me come, whined the Bishop. I have work to do back on Haven. The papal conclave means nothing to me. I am a humble servant of whoever holds Saint Peters keys.

None of us enjoys such a luxury nowadays, retorted del Toro. We all have to make difficult choices. The conclave has begun, and I have heard that Urban XII has left Earth. He feels strong enough to go to Rome and assert his claim in person. The Magellanic Tsar is bound to react. The choice that is made in Rome might cost us our lives.

I shouldnt be a part of this! Agatho protested. I was brought here against my will! I had no choice!

You made your choice years ago, Agatho. You sell your loyalty to whoever offers you the greatest advantage for it. You will love Rome.

Even after her meal, Cat could barely sleep. She felt hurt and confused, and angry with herself for it. The Doctor was so distant sometimes. Hed sort it out, she had no doubt, but that didnt make it any easier for her to cope with what was happening in her mind. A word of comfort was what she needed, not an assessment of their situation. And then Paddy… Just a glimmer of recognition would have been something.

Perhaps he wasnt allowed to talk to prisoners. Perhaps he had already been reprimanded for talking to her. But to deny ever having met her seemed childish.

Then again, round here, they still burned witches. Perhaps Paddyd lost his marbles too. Another thing they had in common.

It was no good. She got up from her makeshift bed a large, folded-up

sheet of tarpaulin and rubbed her eyes. The Doctor was nowhere to be seen.

She wondered whether Father Julian would be up at this time of night, then corrected herself: she had no idea what time was being observed on the rest of the ship, and the dungeon deck was stuck in perpetual twilight. She set off to find a guard.

Hello… she called.

She remembered the lift. Maybe now …

She found it and pressed the button. The machinery hummed into life, and the doors slid open. There was a guard inside.

I want to see the Patriarch, she said, trying to sound as authoritative as possible. He told your boss to organise it.

To her surprise, the guard stepped aside and let her join him in the lift. He punched a button, the doors shut and they began to rise. Three floors later she emerged to see another guard waiting.

This way, miss, the guard said, courteously.

The Doctor was worrying about Cat. It was foolish, he knew. He was used to pulling his friends out of far more dangerous situations than this. It was almost a routine with him.

It didnt always work, of course. He thought of Adric, dead for being a hero, an obstinate intellectual to the end. Katarina, so frightened and so brave …

So many had left him, and hed let them go in peace.

He thought of Jo Grants wedding. Another situation hed wanted to pull her out of

selfish, of course, but it had hurt him at the time. He thought of Tegan, fiery, brave, but always appalled by the destruction, always torn, whether to stay or whether to go. Loyalty versus sanity. Was that the choice he offered his friends?

And of course, Ace. There was never any doubt with her it was loyalty every time.

Perhaps who knew? shed been too dependent. Perhaps one of them had …

And yet hed put her through hell. Hed once performed an autopsy on her corpse. But the loneliness when shed left him he could not have believed the loneliness. Once, in a previous incarnation, he had been happy to travel alone, but now… he was a different person, with different needs. Cat filled that void; she was the companion and friend that he needed to be there.

He forced himself to focus on the job in hand. All he had to do was give his escort the slip before they reached the Patriarchs quarters. He tried a quick bit of hypnotism, but the guard was unresponsive. It tended to have differing results on different cultures in different ages. He needed an aide de mesmer…

A second guard hurried around the corner and beckoned to his escort. The pair huddled into a whisper. The Doctors hand sneaked to a door in the bulkhead. It was open, and as the guards were talking animatedly, the Doctor slipped inside.

He was in some sort of robing room. Priests vestments hung in rows along the back wall. It might work …

No time to undress he snatched up a generous gown and slipped it over his head.

Hed only just got the collar attached when his escort found him. The guard looked at his new outfit, his expression one of confusion and uncertainty.

I am not the man you are looking for, the Doctor said with deep authority. I am a priest. You owe me your obedience. You no longer need to worry about the prisoner.

Father. The guard executed a hasty bow and left the room.

The Doctor exited after him. There were soldiers, ships crew and priests scuttling about, muttering together, and a distinct sense of tension in the air. He intended to make for where he thought the bridge ought to be. He encountered no opposition some of the ships crew even nodded or greeted him as Father as he passed them. He moved about the ship with ease.

Something was definitely up. He decided to brief himself before going any further. He hailed a passing crewman.

Excuse me, whats happening? he asked.

Havent you heard, Father? Pope Urban

We are in a crisis, Doctor.

Del Toro was standing behind the Doctor. He was flanked by guards.

The Magellanic Tsar has invaded the outer systems in support of the blasphemous claims of the devil-fish Brrteetk who calls himself Celestine VI. We are in the middle of a war zone.

He took a pistol from somewhere inside his vestments.

This ship is directly under threat, and the last thing I need is a Time Lord criminal running about my decks dressed as a priest. Take those robes off.

The Doctor did as he was told. Del Toro raised the gun to the Doctors head.

Consider this a summary execution, he said.

CHAPTER SIX

Catherine! The Patriarch welcomed her warmly when the door quarters opened. How are you, my dear? Im all right, Father Julian. How are you? Just old, my dear. Come in, come in. The old man ushered her in and closed the door. How are they treating you? Did you get the food? Yes. Thank you, Father. I tried to get del Toro to move you from the prisoners quarters, but I cannot persuade him, Im afraid.

Its OK, Father. Its not the dungeon, its… me. The Doctor thinks theyre doing something to my mind my memories to make me a Catholic.

The old man rubbed his chin and blinked sympathetically.

If it is possible, he mused, I dont know… but if it were, then certainly I should rely upon del Toro to do it. Nobody in Rome would stop him.

Cat bit her lip.

My poor child…

He placed a light, cold hand upon her cheek.

It felt frail, and trembled

slightly, but Cat sensed the warmth with which the gesture was meant. Guess Ill have to hope the Doctor gets it together. Hes a bit flaky at the moment.

From my limited understanding, said the old man, his soul has been through a great trauma. We humans can but imagine what it must be like to have thirteen souls.

Is that what the Doctor has?

So Saint Yxtryl of Mars taught. He was burned as a heretic, of course, but subsequently canonised. Quite where he stands now, Im not sure.

Thirteen… Sometimes it seems hard to cope with one.

Cat sat down heavily on the old mans bed.

When I first joined the Doctor, he took me to a place where billions of creatures swirled around a newborn star in a huge crystal cloud, singing with a single voice.

He told me that it was a gestalt a single being made up of billions of different parts. Billions of souls… She looked up at the Patriarch in confusion. Or one soul with billions of bodies?

Father Julian gave a shrug. Im no expert on the xenomorph theology. The priests, back home, they used to tell me that pets didnt go to heaven. All the cats and dogs and fish and budgies, they had no souls. They are just animals.

Yes, but they were alive, brimming with life, and over the last few years I have seen so much life in so many different forms! Cat leaned forward. Just before we came here, the Doctor and I met a race of insects called the Wierdarbi. Apparently thats all they were once insects, mindless and primitive. But someone, some higher being, changed them, gave them speech and intelligence, turned them into something new, made them more than just animals. In doing that, did he give them souls as well?

Did he become God in doing so?

Cat sank her head into her hands. I just dont know any more… Everything is so confused!

You should lay the burden before the Lord. Become as a child in his sight, believe now as you believed when a child. Where was the burden back then, eh?

What do you think happens when you die, Father?

One hopes to ascend through purgatory, carried forward on a life led in the bosom of Christ, spurred on by the intercessions of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, and ultimately to enter the Gates of Saint Peter and dwell alongside He who died for our sins.

I dont know if I believe that. It sounds nice, but then, theres the other place.

Hell? The old man smiled. Unlike many, I do not believe the dungeons of the Evil One are overflowing. I fear he has little to occupy him down there, which perhaps explains his persisting presence on this plane.

All right what if theres no hell. What if theres… just nothing. I think that would be worse. I mean… there was nothing before we were born, right?

So the Church holds though some contend that our souls were with Jesus before we were born. We burn these as heretics.

Oh…

The Patriarch smiled. You may speak freely to me, child. Im not sure I would know what a heretic was any more.

So… if there was nothing before, why should we believe therell be anything after?

Because it is promised, the old man said, and that promise has been the foundation and guide to my hundred and forty-odd years on this plane. I would hate to think of them as wasted years.

I havent been to church in years.

It doesnt matter, said the old man. No amount of Hail Marys and unleavened bread can make up for a soul that is filled with hate. Our Lord taught that love opens the gates to paradise, nothing else.

Love of God.

And love of man. The old man smiled. Believe it or not, I used to write love poetry in my youth. All theoretical, of course… or shall we say unrequited?

Do priests fall in love, Father?

Of course! We feel anger and greed and envy we are as prey to sin as any other man, child, and as prone to love. God can satisfy most of that love, but rarely all.

Ive never been in love. Cat shuffled uncomfortably. Was this the sort of conversation she should be having with a man of the cloth?

There is no rush. The old man was smiling at her. You are young and pretty…

There is plenty of time for you to meet the right person. Someone special…

I met a man today. In the hold. A priest. We talked. He was… nice.

The old Patriach gave a coughing laugh. A priest, indeed. Im afraid your…

attentions may have to be directed elsewhere. And I doubt the Grand Inquisitor would appreciate your straying too far. My dispensation on this ship has its limits, Im afraid.

We got on really well. And then later he just blanked me. Cat frowned, replaying their second encounter in her head. He pretended wed never met. Might the Inquisitor have made him do that?

Quite possibly. People nowadays are used to believing what they are told, because to do otherwise would be to attract unwanted attention.

They were interrupted by the sounds of running feet, and an urgent knocking on the door. A squad of guards stood outside.

The ship is under attack, Father, stated the guard leader. You must stay in your quarters until the all-clear is given. With that, the squad headed off along the corridor.

Wait, called the Patriarch. What is going on? The captain of the guards glanced back without breaking step, but didnt answer. I must go, the Patriarch said.

Something is wrong. You may remain in my quarters until I return.

He hastened off after the guards. Cat watched the old man depart, then left his quarters and set off in the other direction, towards the hold. She wanted to find Paddy.

The Doctor was talking for his life, and he could tell that Guii del Toro was becoming impatient.

You can claim all the ancient church privileges you wish, Doctor. Whatever involvement you might have had with our forebears hundreds of years ago is irrelevant. Here, my authority is absolute.

The ship suddenly lurched.

We seem to be under fire, said the Doctor. Shouldnt you be somewhere else?

Indeed, said del Toro. Then, to a captain of the guards, Kill him.

No!

Patriarch Julian was hurrying as best he could in their direction. The guards seemed to hesitate.

Obey my order! shouted del Toro. I am in command here. He has abjured the world!

Hes no one!

Still the guards didnt move. The ship lurched again. Del Toro cursed.

Bring them! he barked and marched off.

Thank you, the Doctor said to the Patriarch.

The Doctor and Father Julian were hustled after the Grand Inquisitor, onto the ships bridge. The atmosphere in the room was one of near-panic, with pilots and technicians struggling to keep the vessel stable under an increasing barrage of fire.

Whats wrong? Return fire! del Toro shouted.

Sire, replied one of the ships officers, executing a hasty bow, theyve knocked out our weapons systems. There are a dozen ships out there. Theres nothing we can do.

The massive screen that dominated the bridge suddenly sprang into life. A huge, scarred, semi-humanoid alien clad in modern battle-armour surmounted with furs, grinned at them from the screen.

The peace of God be with you, the figure said, smirking. I am General Grigg of the Grand Army of the pious Brotak, supreme among species, Tsar of all the Magellanic Clouds, Gods vice-regent in space. Surrender your ship.

No, said del Toro in a tone of low defiance. You know who I am?

No, said Grigg. But I want your ship.

Burn in hell, barbarian! snarled del Toro.

Then you leave me no choice but to take it, said General Grigg, and the screen went blank.

Cat was aware of the lurching of the ship, and hoped that things werent getting too bad. She found her way to the hold again with ease

it was too big to miss, and everyone she passed seemed too preoccupied to challenge her.

There seemed to be some sort of argument going on inside. She could hear a number of voices, some raised, one sobbing. She opened the door and went in.

Kneeling on the floor before the huge black cross was the peasant who had seen the TARDIS arrive in Braak. He was naked to the waist, and was beating his back with a thin, vicious looking stick, scoring great wheals in his own flesh, drawing blood and sobbing loudly.

All gone… he sobbed. My family, my home… now my faith… Why? Why did you show me?

He was screaming now.

You stole my hope of salvation!

He was kneeling in front of an open crate. The other voices seemed to be coming from within the crate.

Ego to absolve, one of them constantly repeated.

No! another shouted. He must burn! All Greeks must burn!

A third voice seemed to be singing quietly in Latin. Cat recognised the tune it was part of the mass for the dead that she had recently attended in Braak cathedral.

The kneeling man hadnt noticed Cat. She edged behind him.

Inside the crate, sitting amongst shreds of packaging, were three disembodied heads.

Two were gleaming and translucent, and Cat could make out a delicate filigree of wires inside the black skulls. The third was nothing more than wires and miniscule tubes, set vaguely in the shape of a skull. Their dead eyes were all looking around, and the two that had mouths were chanting in Latin and ranting about the Greeks respectively. The third was the source of the singing.

Save yourself, if you can, Philippo, another voice rang out across the cavernous hold. There is no salvation to be found in the Church any more.

Cat looked up. It was the Bishop, Agatho, standing over by the

goldfish-bowl control for del Toros machine. At his feet lay the body of one of the priests.

You! Agatho narrowed his eyes as Cat approached.

Whats going on? asked Cat, moving closer so that she could get a better look at the body. She looked at the face of the corpse. She stopped, feeling suddenly ice-cold.

Paddy… she whispered.

Theyve cut into the hull on deck three, sire! Theyre decimating the guard!

Theyre using gas weapons, snarled del Toro.

Do you have protective suits?

No, Doctor. There has been no need since his Holiness outlawed the use of such weapons.

They follow the dolphin Celestine, said the Patriarch archly. Perhaps he disagrees with the ban.

Listen, old man, snarled del Toro, you may be venerated for sitting on your arse in your cloister mumbling mystical nonsense for twenty years, but this is the reality of Gods creation. Its a mess!

He turned to an officer who had just run in. The side of the young mans face was badly burned …

How many of the guard are left? asked del Toro.

Hardly any, sire. Those that havent been shot are starting to get sick. The gas.

Youll have to abandon ship, said the Doctor.

How? sneered del Toro. Theyd blast the escape modules out of the sky.

I take it my TARDIS is aboard? If we can get to it

We have nothing to hold the enemy back with, del Toro interrupted.

Send the robots, said the Doctor.

Robots?

The Doctor crossed the bridge to a young, anxious-looking priest. Hello, he said.

Its Father Paddy, isnt it?

Im sorry? queried the priest. Im Father James Creggan.

The Doctor reached up to the priest, then suddenly gripped his ear and pulled, hard.

His face peeled away in the Doctors hand, revealing a featureless, translucent, black head-shaped shell.

When did the Church start using robots as priests? the Doctor asked.

Del Toro hesitated, then at last he spoke. It is an experimental project that the Inquisition is carrying out under the direct authority of the late Pope. Highly secret, of course.

Scandalous! exclaimed the Patriarch.

Necessary, said the Grand Inquisitor. Orthodoxy can be programmed in. No more rogue prelates wandering the backworlds spreading heresies and blasphemies.

And I suppose its more efficient than bugging confessionals? said the Patriarch.

I know what you and Agatho have been up to.

The Good Shepherd project has not been a great success, said del Toro. We ordered the robots in kit form. The manufacturers sent us duplicate faces for a number of them.

Stock memory-implants, too, commented the Doctor.

Quite. Two priests believed they were actually the same man. The Chief Executive of the company is currently in our custody.

How many robots are aboard?

About fifty. Most of them are out there.

And in here?

Six.

Then send them out there, man!

Theyre not programmed to fight, Doctor.

And yet a robot killed Cardinal Runciman. I knew there was something strange about the faceless monk. When I was… disembodied… everybody was giving off some sort of energy signature an aura. Everybody except the monk. He was a robot, wasnt he?

That was Agathos doing.

Agatho? Why?

To stop Runciman getting to Rome, no doubt, Julian cut in. You have been stirring trouble in the backworlds for months, del Toro, trying to tie the Cardinals hands, prevent him from attending the conclave.

I told Agatho that he had to be stopped as a matter of extreme urgency, said del Toro. I never told him to kill Runciman. The mans unhinged.

What did you do to him?

Cat backed away from the fat, trembling cleric.

I dont know. I was trying to erase his memory, Agatho replied. Hes not human, do you see?

Whats going on?

Im trying to save my skin, said Agatho. Ive only ever done what the Grand Inquisitor asked of me! I wont go to Rome to be accused of murder!

I doubt well get to Rome, said Cat. Cant you feel whats happening to the ship?

Somethings wrong. She started to make for the door. I need to find the Doctor.

Oh no, my dear. I cant let you go now, do you see? Youve seen too much.

He moved to intercept her.

Get out of my way.

Forgive me, Lord, said the Bishop, and his podgy hands extended towards Cats throat.

A row of fresh-faced young priests loaded down with heavy weaponry prepared to break from the bridge and engage the enemies of God, whose gunfire could now be heard through the bulkheads.

Reprogramming them had been simple the Doctor had been familiar with the type.

That should do it, said the Time Lord, patting the last in line on the head. Where are our visitors now?

He turned to the giant screen, now displaying the images from hundreds of internal cameras, like a giant chessboard. Most of the corridors were silent and empty. Some were littered with the twisted or burned corpses of those who had got in the way of the invading forces.

The guard had been brave, but had no defence against the sheer destructive force of the attack. The invaders had blasted their way forward with gas grenades, sending searing, corrosive clouds of vapour sweeping down the corridors. Those guards that had managed to claw their way out of the choking fog had been cut to pieces with knives and axes, their blasters useless in the unexpected hand-to-hand męlée.

The guards had fought to the last man. The secular arm of the Holy Inquisition was severed and broken.

The Doctor suspected that, apart from those remaining on the bridge, there could be few of del Toros forces left alive on the ship.

Down other corridors ran a host of warriors, protected within gas-suits that had been daubed with rough and gaudy religious symbols and hung with the trophies of earlier battles ears, scalps, the occasional entire head, grimacing in death. They carried an eclectic armoury of heavy projectile and plasma-beam weapons, hand-blasters and exotic blade weapons from all over the galaxy. A barbarian horde.

We should get the robots into position, said the Doctor.

The Grand Inquisitor nodded. At this signal, the doors slid silently apart and the priests filed swiftly through. The Doctor had

programmed them all with a simple battle plan. Just enough to pin the enemy down, allowing them time to slip past and out to the storage bays.

We should be ready to go soon, said the Doctor.

Good luck, Doctor, said Patriarch Julian, and may God bless you.

What do you mean? Del Toros eyes narrowed.

Dont worry, Grand Inquisitor, Im not hatching some plot. I leave that to you. Im simply not coming with you.

You cant possibly survive here, said the Doctor. But you know that, dont you?

I am an old man, Doctor, and sometimes the ideas and beliefs that one accumulates over a lifetime can blind one to the fundamentals of ones faith and to the truths of the present. I told Catherine she should be as a child before God, and I must do the same. The Church is in turmoil and I have turned my back on it, when I should be asking what any good child would ask how can I help?

You can do nothing! snapped del Toro. Look around you! All is chaos!

And the Holy Inquisition thrives on chaos. John Paul did nothing to check you, and now you cant risk the conclave uniting behind a single Pope with the power to stop you. Instead, you desire to be Pope yourself, at which point no one will be able to stop you. When did you realise the opportunity that the Doctor and I inadvertently afforded you? Before I did, Ill wager. A Time Lord one of the witches of Haven

accused of murdering a beloved Cardinal, brought to a conclave already riven by fear and paranoia. The place would have erupted!

The conclave doesnt need my intervention, sneered del Toro. Its quite capable of falling apart on its own. I am the only one who can reunite it.

We shall see, said the Patriarch. Open a communication channel to Rome.

Cat had backed up just about as far as she could go. Shed dodged around crates and machinery, working her way towards the door.

Philippo! the Bishop had shouted. Shut the doors!

The flagellant had ignored the Bishop, who had then broken off the chase to go over and kick him, hard, in the back. Thus spurred into action, the man had scampered to his feet, crossed to the entrance and hit a button. As the door slid shut, he turned and placed his back against it, his fists clenched in defiance.

Hey, cmon, said Cat. Im just a girl and hes a Bishop, and hes trying to kill me! That cant be right, can it?

Dont talk to the witch! the Bishop panted.

I can keep this up longer than you, she taunted. Youre three times my age and about twenty times my weight. Youll give yourself a heart attack!

Agatho lunged, and stumbled. Cat sprinted across the hold. She passed the corpse…

or whatever it was… of Paddy, and looked away. Crates were lined in jumbled rows against the far wall, towering towards the ceiling. Cat ducked into the maze, looking around for a way out, or somewhere to hide.

She darted between the towering stacks and skidded to a halt.

She couldnt believe her luck the TARDIS! She ran across to it, fumbling for the key the Doctor had given her. If you get into trouble and Im not there, try to get back to the TARDIS thats what he always said. Somehow things never seemed to work out that way… until now.

It was covered in some sort of shiny, translucent sheet. She tried to grasp it, to find an opening and her hands bounced off. She hugged her tingling fingers to her chest. It felt like shed just had a mild electric shock. She picked up a metal spar from the floor and poked at the covering. The pole bounced off and shuddered from her hand to the deck.

It wasnt material covering the TARDIS, it was some sort of energy field. There had to be a way in …

Suddenly Agathos hands closed around her throat. His fingers bit into her neck, then he twisted and forced her to the ground.

Im sorry, my dear. You heard my confession. It does count, you know. Anyone can be a priest. It means nothing.

Youre barmy! Cat choked.

You are bound by the seal of the confessional, the Bishop continued. You must carry my words to the grave with you. I must make sure that you do.

Cat felt a pressure building up behind her eyes. She felt hotter than ever before.

Her vision began to blur and flicker, and then shut off. The last thing she was aware of before she lost consciousness was Agathos grip relaxing, and his sudden, surprised, delighted laughter.

Here they come…

The first of the Magellanic horde had appeared at the far end of the main access corridor to the lift. The Doctor, the prelates and the four crewmen were peering from a private chapel set off the corridor.

The war-band had split into three main groups, and each was advancing down one of the forward command decks main corridors. A fourth group just three of them was guarding the lift. It seemed as if, having largely scourged the other decks with fire, the main groups had abandoned them.

The priests role was twofold. Three of them would mount a swift attack on the invaders, then disappear down a side-corridor, whereupon they would split up, hopefully getting the invaders lost and unable to return quickly to the main corridor. The other three would then attack the group guarding the lift. It was risky all the Doctors hopes were pinned on the Magellanic horde not being insane enough to use their heavy weaponry this close to the bridge.

Now, Fathers…

On cue, three priests stepped out in front of the approaching horde, raised their heavy blasters and fired straight into the advance. The frontrunners were cut to pieces, then the next ragged rank, and then the next. The others fell back in disorder, howling beneath their gas-masks.

The priests took flight. It took the invaders seconds to recover themselves, and when they did, they charged, roaring, skidding and

jostling around the corner in pursuit of the robotic clerics.

When the last of the mob had disappeared from sight, a door slid open and the other three priests emerged. They sprinted down the corridor, and the Doctor ushered his companions forward, out into the corridor.

We must try to keep up with them, he said, setting off at a trot around the gentle curve of the corridor. The others followed.

They came up behind the priests to find them advancing slowly, weapons raised, ready to take the guards by surprise. The Doctor raised his hand and stopped about fifty yards back.

Be very quiet, he whispered.

The next sound was the swish of an opening door. Two of the invaders were dragging a huge, jewel-covered cross into the corridor. They were behind the priests and saw them at once, dropped the cross and, with rapier speed, unhooked their blade weapons.

One brought a heavy axe down on a priests head, cleaving it in two. The cleric staggered backward and fell to the deck, sparking and twitching.

Another pierced a priest through the back with a viciously curved scimitar, raising the flapping cleric into the air. Slowly the priest slipped down the blade, which rose through his chest like a sharks fin.

The third priest was set upon by the three lift-guards, who thundered around the curving passage, tossed him to the deck and hacked him to pieces.

Before the Doctor could react, del Toro had run forward, dropped to his belly and seized the heavy machine-gun from the priest with the split head. Expertly, he raised the gun and opened fire on the savage orgy. Bullets ripped through invaders and robots alike. By the time the Grand Inquisitor stopped firing, none of them was moving.

Well done, said the Doctor dryly.

Del Toro got to his feet, somewhat breathless.

If he wishes to progress, a priest of the Holy Inquisition must learn many skills, Doctor, he said.

To the death of God!

And then the chink of bottles.

Cat tried to focus on what she was seeing. They were back in front of that massive black cross. Bishop Agatho was sitting lopsidedly on a crate, wine dribbling down his chin and onto his robes. Philippo was fumbling drunkenly with a spherical control console.

Strange lights and nightmarish noises echoed around the hold. Lightning flickered across the coal black arms of the cross.

Ah, youre back with us, my dear, Agatho called cheerfully. Would you care for a drink? We found the stock of communion wine. Theres a veritable lake of it down here!

Why didnt you kill me?

Agatho took another swig.

In time, my dear. Theres a… subtler way of dealing with you. But it will have to wait until I am sober. Del Toros machine is proving… difficult to master. He waggled an unsteady finger at her. No matter. We have plenty of time; nobody comes down here.

No? Then whos that?

She could hear hurried footfalls.

And the Doctors voice!

Hello, Cat. Why are you lying on the floor?

Its a long story, Doctor, but basically this creep tried to kill me, then changed his mind.

Agatho attempted to stir from his crate, then gave up.

Gday day to you, Grand Inquisitor, he slurred.

Get up, Agatho, snapped del Toro. The ships been boarded. Were getting off!

Off? How?

In the Time Lords TARDIS.

No! Philippo, hitherto silent, let out a howl. Ill not get in a Devil-box! Never! Silence, imbecile, snapped del Toro. This is all your fault,

Philippo said in a low snarl. You, Grand Inquisitor! You took me from Braak took me right off Haven Del Toros hand swept across Philippos face, striking the words from his mouth.

A low, gurgling moan rose in Philippos throat. It became a scream of rage and anger.

He launched himself at the Inquisitor, hands grasping at his neck.

You are no man of God! screamed the trader. You are an instrument of evil! You and all your kind.

Del Toro clawed savagely at Philippos face, his breath gurgling horribly in his throat. His feet slipped on the slick deck-plates as he found himself being forced remorselessly back towards the gaping chasm beneath the cross.

The Doctor tried to wrestle the two men apart, but Philippo kicked him savagely out of the way. The Doctor crashed to the ground, hard.

Blood streamed from Philippos face. Del Toro scrabbled desperately for the blaster hidden within his robes.

Philippo snatched the blaster from the Inquisitors grasp and hurled it aside. It skittered across the deck and tumbled into the void beneath the cross. There was an angry clashing of gears, and sparks tore from the void. Del Toro whimpered in pain as blue lightning flickered around him.

Inch by inch, Philippo pushed the struggling instrument of the Holy Inquistitioin towards the machine. He slammed his hand down on the control globe. A deep, resonating throb shook the hold. Lights blazed and a high, keening whine tore through the air. Robotic arms whirred into life, reaching out for the struggling men.

The Doctor tried to haul himself across the juddering deck, reaching desperately for the control console.

No, Philippo, no!

Philippo shot him a look of total despair.

Forgive me. With superhuman effort, he launched himself and del Toro into the void.

Cat screamed as trader and Inquisitor crashed into the base of the huge basalt cross.

The grasping robotic arms caught hold of them, and the two men were snatched high into the air and slammed against the gleaming black machinery, wires and tubes snaking from the void to embrace them Lightning ripped through their bodies, their skeletons flashing like beacons through their flesh.

Cat saw the Doctors face contort in anguish as the machine screamed into life.

For a moment the two men hung there, del Toro struggling desperately against the vice-like grip of the little Braakan trader. Then there was a noise like tearing paper and the two mens bodies… blurred.

Cat watched in horror as features melted and swam, flesh became like liquid flowing over their bones. The lightning from the machine became more and more intense, sending huge shadows dancing across the hold.

Through the flickering light, Cat caught glimpses of nightmare shapes. Bodies combining and recombining in impossible, horrible variety. Above the noise of the machine, she could hear del Toro screaming.

And then it went horribly silent.

The Doctor hauled himself over to the side of the void and stared in horror at the fused mass of flesh that hung on the steaming basalt cross. He wanted to live forever, he murmured. Wanted a machine, that could endlessly regenerate him.

What did it do to them? Cat was feeling sick.

The Doctor caught hold of Cats arm, turning her away from the mutated monstrosity.

All it could do. Tried to change one body into another…

My God! came another voice. Whats happened?

Cats heart leaped. Father Julian was limping across the room.

Father, the Doctor greeted him, wearily. How did you get past the soldiers?

My position tends to overawe many of the new converts from less developed worlds. I told them I wanted to come and pray over the bones of saints.

Father Julian looked over at Cat. How are you, my dear?

Im OK… I think.

The Patriarch smiled. The Doctor is good at what he puts his hearts into

He paused and gripped a shelf, stooping and coughing.

How do you feel? the Doctor asked.

Dizzy, sick. I think I must have a fever, Doctor.

Its the gas, said the Doctor, worriedly stroking his chin. Where there are fires burning, the levels are still building. Theyll soon reach lethal levels.

The Patriarch hobbled up to where Agatho was slumped in a drunken haze.

Del Toro? the old man enquired.

Gone the way of all flesh, giggled Agatho drunkenly. And you, Father. Did your wisdom prevail?

Sadly not, said the Patriarch. Rome is besieged. The papal guard have rounded up anyone at the conclave who has expressed sympathy for the dolphin Celestine. I had to plead over the communication channel for their lives. To no avail, I fear.

Bonaventure?

Rethinking, I imagine. Plotting. In the meantime, we have been offered sanctuary by Father Habemus Papem.

Who? slurred Agatho.

A monk from Baloosh Minor.

I dont know him.

Technically, the Doctor said, its not a him. The Balooshi have no gender. Theyre small strands of vegetable slime.

That small strand of vegetable slime is a spiritual giant, Doctor, the Patriarch reprimanded gently.

There was a sudden, deep vibration somewhere overhead, followed by others, and then a low groaning sound.

Weve got to leave now! urged the Doctor. Those maniacs are discharging their heavy weapons close to the vital systems! The ship will break apart!

As he spoke, Cat felt the deck lurch and tilt.

You want to get out in your ship? Agatho slurred.

Yes, yes, the Doctor snapped.

You cant. Its held in a stasis field. Del Toro had the deactivator. He belched obscenely The main controls are on the deck above.

The ship lurched again. Cat had to hold on to the Doctor for support. The room began to tremble and shudder.

I was only following his orders, the Bishop sneered.

How long have we got, Doctor? one of the crewmen asked.

About ten minutes, the Doctor replied. If that.

Not enough time, Agatho said. He seemed to be enjoying his prophet-of-doom role.

Maybe time to get there, but never to get there and back. Anyway, what was that you said about the gas? A robot could make it, perhaps, but never a human.

The Doctor wasnt listening. He was examining Paddys corpse.

If I could repair it… but theres no time, he muttered.

Are there any more robots? Cat asked.

All destroyed, said the Doctor.

Not all, Doctor, said Agatho. There is one more.

His eyes darted between them. He wore a drunken, eager grin. Eh, Doctor?

He winked at Cat.

Oh dear Lord, whispered Father Julian, his voice a mix of compassion and despair.

Whats going on? Cat asked. Why were they all looking at her?

Well, Doctor, Agatho hiccupped, are you going to tell her, or shall I?

NOTE

The authors would like to point out in case any readers are wondering that Companion Piece was devised and commissioned before the Doctor Who audio drama Death Comes To Time was written (although the latter made its public debut first), and it is pure coincidence that both feature a similar plot twist. As anyone familiar with Doctor Who will be aware, this is by no means the first time that two stories have coincidentally made use of similar ideas, and we hope that no ones enjoyment of the book has been marred.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Robert Perry and Mike Tucker were born and brought up in South Wales, and it was in 1977, whilst they were at school (by coincidence, the same school as Russell T Davies, writer of the forthcoming new Doctor Who series) that they first met and started writing together.

They moved to London in the 1980s, Robert studying Law at the London School of Economics, Mike taking the Theatre Design course at Croydon College. Since then, the two of them have pursued separate careers in the media Robert in a variety of roles, ranging from songwriter and musician with prog rock outfit The Enid to story editor on the BBCs long running soap opera EastEnders, and Mike as a technician and designer with the BBC Special Effects Department, working on a full range of television shows including cult favourites Red Dwarf and Doctor Who.

The duos writing credits include a number of short stories for Virgin Publishing and BBC Books, the Doctor Who novels Illegal Alien, Matrix, Storm Harvest and Loving the Alien and, for Big Finishs range of Tomorrow People CDs, the audio drama The Sign of Diolyx.

Individually, Robert has written scripts for Family Affairs and Is Harry on the Boat, whilst Mike has contributed solo novels and audio dramas both to the Doctor Who and Bernice Summerfield ranges of books and CDs. He also co-authored the behind the scenes book Ace! with former Doctor Who companion Sophie Aldred.

The two of them are currently developing a number of story ideas both scripts and books for a variety of publishers and broadcasters, and wondering how the last 25

years have gone past so quickly.